**University of Alberta**

# Toward a Grounded Theory of the Psychosocial Competencies Involved in Becoming a Professional Soccer Player

By

Nicholas L. Holt

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
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Date April 30th 2002.

**Quotation**

*After many years in which the world has afforded me many experiences, what I know most surely in the long run about morality and obligations, I owe to football.*

Albert Camus, goalkeeper (1957).

**University of Alberta**

**Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research**

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled: Toward a Grounded Theory of the Psychosocial Competencies Involved in Becoming a Professional Soccer Player submitted by Nicholas L. Holt in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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**Abstract**

The general purpose of this study was to identify and examine psychosocial competencies and environmental conditions underlying the talent development experiences of elite male adolescent athletes from Canada and England who aspired to become professional soccer players. Canadian and English perspectives were compared and contrasted, leading to the development of a theory of the psychosocial competencies that play a role in the development of professional soccer players. Participants were 20 international soccer players (Mean age = 16.8 years) and 14 soccer players (Mean age = 16.2 years) and six coaches employed by professional soccer clubs in England. Using grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), data were primarily collected via formal interviews which were supplemented by informal interviews, observation, and documentary analysis. Data analysis and collection occurred simultaneously where possible, and analysis followed an inductive-deductive process geared toward theory development. Techniques used to ensure the methodological rigor of this study included thick description, technique triangulation, member-checking, and maintaining a reflexive journal. Both Canadian and English findings indicated that important psychosocial competencies involved in the talent development process for soccer were developing discipline (conforming dedication to the sport and willingness to sacrifice), cultivating ambition (via strong task-commitment motives and career planning goals), becoming resilient (using coping strategies to overcome obstacles), and benefiting from the perceived availability of social support from parents and friends (emotional, informational, and tangible support). Canadian soccer players faced several obstacles related to the talent development structure for soccer in Canada, and the absence of a

nationwide adult professional league. Findings were discussed with reference to previous research on talent development, and a theory of the psychosocial competencies involved with becoming a professional soccer player presented.

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## List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| CBC | Canadian Broadcasting Corporation |
| CIS | Canadian Inter-University Sport |
| CSA | Canadian Soccer Association |
| CUSL | Canadian United Soccer League |
| EFA | English Football Association |
| ESM | Experience Sampling Method |
| FIFA | Federation International de Football Association |
| GCSE | General Certificate of Secondary Education |
| GT | Grounded Theory |
| IQ | Intelligence Quotient |
| MLS | Major League Soccer |
| NCAA | National Collegiate Association of America |
| NPSL | National Professional Soccer League |
| NHL | National Hockey League |
| NTC | National Training Center |
| PDL | Professional Development League |
| TSN | The Sports Network |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| US | United States |
| YTS | Youth Training Scheme |

# CHAPTER 1:
# INTRODUCTION

*Some men are born great,*
*Some achieve greatness,*
*Others have greatness thrust upon them.*
William Shakespeare, English Playwright.

How do talented children become elite adult athletes? Many young people start on the road toward becoming a professional athlete, but few achieve this level of performance. Although detailed research has been conducted on the psychological characteristics of successful elite adult athletes (see Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996 for a review), less is known about how these characteristics are cultivated and developed (Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 2001). Acquiring knowledge about talent development will facilitate the creation of more effective talent development systems that are sensitive to the needs of young athletes.

Researchers interested in talent development in sport have generally sought to identify and examine the characteristics that successful adult athletes acquire (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Gould et al., 2001; Vernacchia, McGuire, Reardon, & Templin, 2000). Alternatively, sport sociologists have analyzed socialization processes influencing talent development (e.g., Carlson, 1988; Donnelly, 1993; Hill, 1993; Stevenson, 1990), and youth sport researchers have started to examine the influence of family context on talent development (Côté, 1999; Kay, 2000). Previous investigations have almost exclusively been dedicated to the analysis of participants competing in individual or co-acting sports that have an 'amateur' sport development structure, including rowing (Côté, 1999; Kay, 2000), tennis (Côté, 1999; Kay, 2000; Monsaas, 1985), swimming (Kalinowski, 1985; Kay, 2000), and track and field (Gould et al., 2001; Vernacchia et al., 2000). Individual sports have been over-represented largely for reasons of convenience (Monsaas, 1985). The current study exclusively examines talent development in a professional team sport system.

Talent development research has predominantly focused on experiences of athletes from the USA. Indeed, sport psychology research in general has not been

extensively concerned with cross-national comparisons or analyses within culturally pluralistic countries such as the US, Canada, and England (Duda & Allison, 1990). Culturally diverse research is required to establish the meaning and experiences of sport participation for youth from a range of backgrounds (Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001). The potential benefits of examining sport developmental processes across relevant countries have yet to be realized in the sport psychology literature.

Overall, researchers have done an excellent job of identifying *general* patterns of talent development over the life-span (e.g., the development of increasing commitment to sport of choice) and significant social influences (e.g., the role of coaches and parents). However, the majority of this research describes phases of learning that cover the entire career of a performer. Research with performers who have already reached a mature level of performance may not yield as much information about the early stages of their athletic involvement in comparison to analysis of younger athletes (Côté, 1999). Further work is needed to understand the specific nature of psychosocial competencies elite athletes acquire during adolescence as they pursue professional sport careers.

Acquiring knowledge with regard to the development of psychosocial competencies among talented adolescent athletes will provide scientific evidence for practitioners working in talent development systems. Researchers have been encouraged to consider alternative paradigms to obtain information about the experiences of athletes (Martens, 1987). In fact, qualitative research methodologies have been recommended for future research on experiences in youth and adolescent sport (Brustad et al., 2001; Weiss, 1993). However, conceptual and theoretical developments from qualitative research are largely absent, both in the social sciences generally (Morse, 1997) and more specifically in the sub-discipline of sport psychology. Providing an account of the developmental experiences of elite adolescent athletes is a necessary step in the development of explanatory theories about the causes and origins of excellence in sport (Côté, 1999). Explanatory theories of adolescent talent development will provide practitioners with a stronger scientific basis for their interventions that may be more appropriate for meeting athletes' needs.

There were three main purposes of the current study. The general purpose was to identify and examine psychosocial competencies and environmental conditions

underlying the talent development experiences of male elite adolescent athletes from Canada and England who aspired to become professional soccer players. A secondary purpose was to compare and contrast the emergent Canadian and English perspectives for similarities and differences relating to talent development in soccer. The final objective of this investigation was to propose a theory pertaining to the psychosocial competencies and environmental conditions that play a role in the development of professional soccer players.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided initial focus and direction for this study, and were reflexively addressed during the course of the investigation:

(1) What psychosocial competencies do elite adolescent athletes require to become professional adult soccer players?
(2) What basic psychosocial transitions do adolescent soccer players experience?
(3) How does the social environment influence adolescent players' development?
(4) What are the social and psychological pressures faced by these players and how do they cope with these pressures?

Definition of Key Terms

The study of achievement in sport involves the search for patterns of talent development across exceptional individuals at particular developmental stages. This search frequently encounters terminology that varies according to the specific domain perspective. For example, developmental psychologists refer to the emergence of exceptional abilities, giftedness, and/or talent, whereas sport psychology researchers frequently use terms like mental skills and psychological abilities to describe the capabilities of athletes. Some of the key terms used in the current investigation are defined below.

Talent development. Talent development is regarded as the successful interaction between an individual and his/her context. Specifically, talent development can be defined as goal-oriented individuals reciprocally and successfully interacting with changing contextual opportunities and constraints (Van Lieshout & Heymans, 2000).

Psychosocial competencies. The term 'psychosocial competencies' is used here to refer to athletes' *awareness* of the psychological processes and social influences inherent

in their talent development context, and their *understanding* of the appropriate deployment of psychological and social skills for the purpose of enhancing their career development in sport.

Adolescence. The term adolescence was used throughout this study to refer to the period of middle adolescence, aged 15-18 years (Steinberg, 1993).

Elite athlete. Individuals who had participated at their sport for at least two years and were competing at international and/or professional levels were considered as elite athletes in this study (cf. Feltz & Ewing, 1987).

# CHAPTER 2:
# CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

The conceptual context used for this study represents the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform the research to be undertaken (Maxwell, 1996). As the researcher is the instrument *par excellence* in qualitative research approaches (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researcher's identity, philosophical assumptions, and beliefs that guide research decisions should be explicitly included in a study because they influence the research process (Berg & Smith, 1988; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Sparkes, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). The search for personal, philosophical, and methodological assumptions is the starting point for this inquiry. Assumptions do not disappear as the study progresses; rather they relate to the entire research process and must be consistent and coherent throughout an investigation.

A personal purpose of this investigation is related to that fact that I was an adolescent soccer player with youth level professional and national teams, but failed to make the transition to adult professional or international soccer. Therefore, this study meets some personal practical purposes in understanding the skills that adolescent performers require to complete the transition to adult sport; skills I was unable to master during adolescence

## The Interpretive - Critical Approach

My philosophical grounding bridges boundaries between interpretive and critical paradigms. It is most closely related to the interpretive paradigm, but involves dimensions of the critical perspective. Anderson (1989) referred to the critical-interpretive approach, in which reality is taken to be socially constructed and knowledge is seen as being context specific and value-laden (Bain, 1989; Sparkes, 1992). Although my approach is very similar to Anderson's (1989) description, I have selected the term 'interpretive-critical' because my research philosophy is more steeped in the interpretive than critical paradigm (though it includes elements of both).

The goal for researchers operating from the interpretive paradigm is to understand the social world at the level of subjective experience (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), whereas critical researchers tend to pay more attention to the place of individuals within wider

socio-historical, political, and economic processes. Therefore, the objective of researchers operating from the shared interpretive-critical perspective is to locate the thoughts and actions of individuals and groups within the wider socio-historical sphere to produce a deeper understanding of social reality (Sparkes, 1992). At the heart of social research is the idea that knowledge is structured by an existing set of social relations. Therefore, the aim of the research undertaken here is to uncover shared subjective experiences and examine ways in which such experiences are structured and shaped by historical and political forces (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Harvey, 1990).

Ontological assumptions. Reality, from the interpretive-critical perspective, is viewed as multiple *and* individual, therefore, numerous value-laden constructions of reality are possible (Sparkes, 1995). Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggested that, "social reality, insofar as it is recognized to have any existence outside of the consciousness of any single individual, is regarded as being little more than a network of assumptions and inter-subjectively shared meanings" (p. 28). In the social world, researchers are participants in the process of "making social reality, rather than discoverers of realities and characteristics of an independently existing reality" (J. K. Smith, 1989, p. 84). In order to access perceptions of social reality, it is suggested that a researcher cannot adopt a 'God's eye view' of the social world, hoping to know the world from a place outside it. As Wolcott (1990) proposed, "I do not go about trying to understand a ready made world we are continuously in the process of constructing" (p. 147).

A useful way of comprehending multiple subjective interpretations of reality can be gained by examining examples from ethnographic research.[1] Fetterman (1989) suggested an *emic* perspective - - the insider's or native's view of reality - - "compels the recognition of reality in a given study, and is crucial to an understanding of why people think and act in the different ways they do" (p. 30). Woods (1986) continued that such research tries to uncover beliefs, motivations, values, perspectives, and experiences from "*within* the group... It is *their* meanings, *their* language ... each type of group have constructed their own highly distinctive cultural realities. If we are to understand them, we need to penetrate their boundaries and look out from the inside" (pp. 4-5). From the emic perspective, shared meanings are actively created by people via social agreement.

---

[1] Ethnographic research is concerned with the examination of culture or sub-culture.

The emphasis is on human consciousness, but the ways in which it is shaped and limited by existing social arrangements that serve the interests of some groups of society are not lost (Sparkes, 1992).

Epistemological assumptions. From the interpretive-critical stance, social realities exist in people's minds and can be accessed via subjective interaction (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Knowledge is a human construction, which means, "it can never be certifiable as ultimately true, but rather problematic and ever-changing" (Sparkes, 1992, p. 26). Knowledge is viewed as a matter of the trustworthiness of social agreement (Popkewitz, 1984). As J. K. Smith (1984) argued, "for interpretive inquiry, the basis of truth, or trustworthiness, is social agreement; what is judged true or trustworthy is what we can agree, conditioned by time and place, is true and trustworthy" (p. 386). Knowledge can be acquired on the basis of shared visions and other common understandings that are socially constructed (Sparkes, 1992).

The process of recognizing assumptions underpinning a study can provide a valuable source of insight about the manner in which an investigation of a phenomena proceeds, and may help researchers to improve the quality of their research (Bouffard, Strean, & Davis, 1998). As such, it is important to clarify these assumptions at the start of an investigation because they influence research decisions and interpretations that occur throughout the research process. By understanding the researcher's biases and assumptions, the reader is in a better position to evaluate the resulting research conducted by the 'researcher-instrument.'

# CHAPTER 3:
# LITERATURE REVIEW

Typically, qualitative researchers are not explicitly driven by theory, but empirical generalizations can help form initial questions and working hypotheses during the beginning stages of data collection (Maxwell, 1996). The question is not whether to use existing theory, but how and when theory should be used in qualitative research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990). For the current study, an exhaustive literature review was delayed until the final reporting stage so as not to hinder the creative process of theory generation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

## Contemporary Perspectives on Adolescent Development

Researchers from developmental and educational psychology have examined exceptional performance and talent development in education, the performing arts, and, to a much lesser extent, sport. Developmental psychologists Van Lieshout and Heymans (2000) suggested that giftedness and talent should not be viewed as stable individual differences in potential or performance. Rather, developmental changes in talents should be examined in close relation to changing contextual support, constraints, and tasks. That is, the properties that form the basis for talented behavior emerge over time (Smitsman, 2000). Van Lieshout and Heymans viewed talent development as a result of goal-oriented individuals reciprocally and successfully interacting with changing contextual opportunities and constraints.

Adolescence is traditionally regarded as a period of transition between childhood and adulthood, and may be divided into three phases: early (11-14 years); middle (15-18 years); and late (19-21 years) (Steinberg, 1993). Social changes in family structure, education, and employment over the last decade have led to contemporary adolescence being considered as a time of *multiple transitions* (Coleman & Roker, 1998). For instance, the adolescent period is longer than it used to be, with puberty starting earlier and young adults remaining out of the labour market (and therefore financially dependent) for longer than has been the case in previous decades (Coleman & Roker, 1998). As such, the period of middle adolescence in particular appears to be extended.

Multiple transitions are based on the attainment of a variety of developmental tasks that continue over the life-span, but are particularly significant during adolescence

when there is a search for processes and new orientations to the world (Brettschneider & Heim, 1997). The terms 'storm and stress' (Hall, 1904) have traditionally been used to symbolise a period of chronic emotional turbulence during adolescence. Hall argued it was characteristic of youth to vacillate between extremes of sorrow and exuberance, and to shift unexpectedly between friendly altruism and selfish hoarding. However, it has been claimed that adolescence storm and stress is placed out of proportion by studying individuals already in turmoil (Offer, 1969). The need to identify positive and negative outcomes of multiple adolescent transitions has been emphasized (Coles, 1995). The extent to which individuals experience storm and stress may be based on the personal resources they possess. For example, certain individuals may have heightened sensitivity to change during adolescence, whereas others may have sufficient personal resources to cope with the range of biological, social, emotional, and psychological transitions they face (Coleman & Roker, 1998; Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

Biological transitions. Striking biological transitions occur during adolescence as the individual enters the period with the appearance of a child, and leaves with the appearance of an adult. These biological changes have social and psychological implications. Fox (1997) described the body as the means by which individuals present themselves to the social world. There is considerable agreement in the literature about the role of the body and physical self-concept for identity development in adolescence (Fox, 1997). A rapidly changing body provides a challenge in the formation of a coherent identity. Variations in biological development should be considered within their cultural and social context. In western cultures people are increasingly concerned with the management and appearance of the body, both as a constituent of self and as a social symbol (Sparkes, 1997).

Social transitions. Social transitions reflect the beginning of training for adult roles in early adolescence, to the attainment of full adult status and privileges by late adolescence. As the individual enters middle adolescence the influence of the family tends to diminish and the peer group becomes an increasingly important social force. Parents, teachers, and other adults often lose their power of persuasion as the need for peer approval becomes more compelling. Peer groups play a vital and needed role in the socialization of adolescents for adulthood, providing a set of relationships and friendships

that could not be achieved in the family where generally there is a primary authority figure. The peer group is transitory, but it has the capability of shaping adolescents' dress, speech, or actions, because individuals interact as equals (Brown, 1990; Payne & Isaacs, 1999). Social acceptability for boys may be based on athletic ability and willingness to become involved in athletically oriented activities (Payne & Isaacs, 1999). Through involvement in peer groups and a decreasing reliance on the family, adolescents prepare themselves for the adoption of more adult roles in society.

Emotional transitions. Social transitions during middle adolescence have emotional consequences related to the detachment from parents and attainment of a separate, unique, and worthwhile sense of identity (Steinberg, 1993). Adolescents develop a sense of individuation-separation whereby they learn to take personal responsibility for their choices and actions instead of looking toward their parents to do it for them (Blos, 1967; Josselson, 1980). Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1966) were pioneers of identity research, suggesting that the establishment of a coherent sense of identity is the chief psychosocial crisis of adolescence. Unfortunately, research on identity has largely been based on studies of white American college youth and may lack applicability across cultures and settings (Coleman & Roker, 1998).

In modern fragmented society, roles expected of teenagers are unclear, leading some researchers to suggest that opportunities for adolescents to describe and define themselves on the basis of sound, traditionally valued models are limited (Koteskey, Walter, & Johnson, 1990). As the entry into adulthood becomes more problematic, notions of identity formation have received a great deal of attention (Coleman & Roker, 1998). Modern adolescents are called upon to be producers of their own biographies and to make their own decisions, providing a freedom to create a new youth identity, but the search for the real self during this dynamic period is complex and challenging (Brettschneider & Heim, 1997).

It is plausible that through their involvement and success in sport, adolescent athletes become valued and recognized as individuals outside their home, which contributes to the development of an athletic identity (Tiihonen, 1994). Athletic identity represents the degree to which athletes define their self-worth in terms of their participation and achievement in sport (Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001). However, when athletes

commit heavily to sport, their opportunities to engage in exploratory behavior in other areas may be curtailed (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Pearson & Petitpas 1990). Research shows that individuals with a strong, exclusive, and early commitment to the athlete role are less prepared for post-sport careers than individuals who have invested less in the athlete role (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Although involvement in athletics may provide adolescents with a pathway to the development of a coherent identity, early and exclusive commitment to an athletic role can be problematic when that role is terminated by injury or retirement.

Psychological transitions. Psychological transitions during adolescence include the development of more advanced cognitive reasoning abilities and the capacity for abstract thought. Piaget's (1950) cognitive stage model of intellectual development has been influential in developmental psychology. Piaget argued the growth of formal-operational thinking is the chief feature of adolescent thinking that differentiates it from the type of thinking employed by children. The development of formal thinking is proposed to take place in two stages. In the first stage adolescents demonstrate formal thinking intermittently. By the second stage formal thinking becomes more integrated into the individual's general approach to reasoning. If levels of environmental stimulation are sufficient, formal-operational abilities are consolidated sometime during middle or late adolescence, but the final consolidation of formal reasoning is not very common (Piaget, 1950). Contemporary research suggests that advanced reasoning capacities develop gradually and continuously from childhood through adolescence and beyond, probably in more of a qualitative fashion than originally proposed by Piaget (Steinberg, 1993).

## Psychosocial Giftedness

Several attempts have been made to develop theories of giftedness and talent development in educational and developmental psychology. For example, educational psychologist Joseph Renzulli (1978, 1986) suggested a psychosocial theory of giftedness, positing that gifted people possess equal amounts of above average ability, task commitment, and creativity. Above-average ability refers to general abilities (i.e., the capacity to process information, integrate experiences, and engage in creative thinking), and specific abilities (i.e., the capacity to acquire knowledge, skill, or ability to perform

specialized activities). Task commitment is a refined form of motivation, defined as "the energy brought to bear on a particular problem or specific performance area" (Renzulli, 1986, p. 69). Finally, creativity refers to a sense of flexibility, originality of thought, and sensitivity to detail. Renzulli described giftedness as a set of behaviors that manifest themselves in certain people, at certain times, and under certain circumstances. Renzulli's work had a profound impact on educational practice in the USA (Carter & Swanson, 1990), including the widespread adoption of the identification scheme (Renzulli, Reis, & Smith, 1981) and instructional model (Renzulli, 1978). Although the research underpinning the model has been questioned (e.g., Jarrell & Borland, 1990), Renzulli's work has endured such criticism and remained as a popular theory of giftedness (Renzulli, 1988, 1990).

More recently, Piirto (1999) attempted to synthesize a number of theories of giftedness by providing a summary model of previous research. This model is based on five categories of biological, psychological, and social factors that are at the heart of talent development processes. The first category includes genetic factors that may be important during the aging process. The second category focuses on personality attributes. Specifically, Piirto suggested that resilience (i.e., the ability to bounce back after adversity, trauma, or rejection) is an important aspect of personality for the emergence of giftedness. The third category of Piirto's (1999) model is the cognitive dimension, but here the notion of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) should not be overemphasized because people with a high IQ are a special type of gifted people, but not the only type of gifted people. A high IQ might be important in areas such as science (Simonton, 1998), but less important for predicting success in the athletic domain or the performing arts (cf. Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993). The fourth category of the model is called the talent aspect, reflecting the contribution of the innate gifts an individual may possess. Piirto posited that the presence of talent in childhood, though absolutely necessary, is not enough to develop talent in adulthood. She described the importance of a vocational calling, passion, or inspiration for a domain as a crucial component in the development of talent in adulthood.

Finally, the fifth category of the model represents a move beyond the individual to consider wider 'outside of school' influences that bear upon the performances of gifted

students. Ideally a child should be in a positive and nurturing home environment, and in a community and culture that conveys values compatible with the educational institution and that provides support for the home and the school. Piirto's (1999) attempt at synthesizing available research in giftedness is a notable work. There seems to be evidence for each of the discrete categories of the model, but as yet there is not evidence for the way these categories interact. The model does include virtually every current issue in giftedness, which is useful in providing a heuristic to guide research. However, models of giftedness from educational and developmental psychology do not adequately address the athletic domain (and specifically do not consider professional sport environments).

Talent Development in Sport

The predominant thinking in sport psychology research over the last 20 years has not been particularly sensitive to developmental issues relating to talent development in sport (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001). However, several investigators have used retrospective recall interviews with elite adult athletes to identify their life-span developmental experiences in sport (Bloom, 1985; Carlson, 1988; Donnelly, 1993; Ericsson et al., 1993; Gould et al., 2001; Hill, 1993; Stevenson, 1990; Vernacchia et al., 2000). Other studies have obtained reports from talented teenagers, their coaches, and their parents to understand more about talent development processes during particular developmental stages (Brettschneider, 1999; Côté, 1999; Cskikszentmihayli, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Kay, 2000; Parker, 1996). These previous investigations have generally adopted either a psychological or sociological perspective.

Psychological Research on Talent Development in Sport

The seminal work examining the development of talent among elite athletes and a variety of other high-achievers was presented by Bloom (1985). Adopting a retrospective interview approach, Bloom (1985) and colleagues undertook a four-year longitudinal study of 120 talented athletes, musicians, artists, and scientists. Of the 120 participants, interviews were conducted with 21 Olympic swimmers (10 male, 11 female), and one or both of their parents (Kalinowski, 1985), and 18 tennis players (10 male, 8 female) who had been ranked in the world top ten between 1968 and 1979, and one or both of their parents (Monsaas, 1985). Bloom was interested in the development of talent and expertise through developmental processes, rather than the innate gifts of the individual,

or the practice regimens they adopted. Indeed, a basic premise of his approach was that "Unless there is a long and intensive process of encouragement, nurturance, education, and training, the individuals will not attain extreme levels of capability in these particular fields" (p. 3). The proposition that the talent requires years of commitment to learning was of vital importance to the science of talent development (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001).

Bloom and his colleagues summarized that talent development occurred through three principal stages across the life-span. The first stage was referred to as the "Stage of Initiation" (Bloom, 1985), in which children engaged in fun and playful activities. During this time they relied heavily on their teacher or coach for guidance and support, and at some point parents or teachers noticed the children were apparently talented in some way. Parents played a key role in the initial development of children's talents, and they were often responsible for stimulating their child's interest in their own personal areas of activity. Parents were also an excellent source of energy and motivation for their child (Bloom, 1985).

In the middle years, the "Stage of Development" (Bloom, 1985) children became hooked on a particular activity. For example, they became gymnasts rather than children who did gymnastics (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001). Pursuits became more serious at this stage, and teachers and coaches were more technically skilled than at the previous level. Coaches took a strong personal interest in their prodigies, and expected results through discipline and hard work. Practice time increased significantly during the middle years, and competition was used as a measure of progress. Crucially, parents provided both moral and financial support, and helped to restrict their child's engagement in distracting activities such as paid employment and social outings with friends (Bloom, 1985).

The third stage, the "Stage of Perfection" (Bloom, 1985), represents the time when performers become experts in their chosen activity which now tended to dominate their lives. Performers were willing to invest the time and effort required to meet their performance goals. Responsibility for training and competition shifted from coaches to the individual. Simultaneously, performers were required to be autonomous and be able to deal with enormous demands from their coaches. Parents played a lesser role as

individuals became completely absorbed in their actions and assumed total responsibility for them. Bloom emphasized that precocious children need a long-term commitment and increasing passion for their field if their talent is to develop in later life.

Bloom's (1985) study was a seminal work, providing an initial descriptive basis for the understanding of talent development across a variety of domains. However, many of the generalizations presented attempt to summarize developmental patterns as they occur over the life-span. Although a significant amount of attention was paid to highlighting the changing interactions between parent and child, the psychosocial competencies required by the athletes to cope with these changes were not fully explored. For example, the suggestion that parents play a lesser role in the stage of perfection appears to be an appropriate generalization, but it does not explain what role parents actually did play, and how this influenced the psychological development of their children. Furthermore, it is not clear how particular stages of development relate to particular stages of adolescence, which is important because adolescents face different developmental tasks as adolescence progresses. It is difficult to garner this specific information about adolescent development without conducting investigations of adolescent performers.

Due to the informal presentation of Bloom's (1985) findings via a 'popular' book format, Bloom provided limited information about methodology, data collection and analysis techniques, and integration with previous research. Bloom and his colleagues relied on retrospective recall interviews, which may be problematic (Brewer, Van Raalte, Linder, & Van Raalte, 1991; Haggard, Brekstak, & Skard, 1960; Mednick & Shaffer, 1963). Additionally, assuming participants were about 25 years old at the time of their top performance level, the data collected is based on retrospective recall of adolescent experiences from the 1960s. Although Bloom's study was very appropriate at the time, social conditions and associated developmental tasks faced by adolescents have changed considerably since the 1960s (Coleman & Roker, 1998), and objective measures of sport performance also reveal dramatic increases in performance levels (Ericsson, 1996). It is important to examine contemporary adolescent talent development in sport in order to ascertain the on-going validity of Bloom's findings.

Following a similar research design to that adopted by Bloom (1985), Vernacchia et al. (2000) interviewed 15 US track and field athletes (9 males, 6 females) who participated in one or more Olympic games (from 1984-1996). The researchers investigated athletes' recollections of their dreams, developmental influences, performance obstacles, mental preparation, salient mental and physical qualities, and advice to young athletes. Results indicated that psychosocial skills were important in the athletic and personal development of elite track and field athletes. In particular, social support systems (i.e., coaches and parents), a sound work ethic and the cumulative effect of sustained training (where the emphasis was on fun and enjoyment, persistence, and living a 'clean' lifestyle) were factors related to successful development. The ability to overcome obstacles such as injury, financial pressures, the death of a parent, and 'doomsayers' were also important factors in achieving high levels of performance. Finally, mental and physical preparation strategies were perceived as important elements of elite track and field performance (Vernacchia et al., 2000). This interesting descriptive study with successful athletes paves the way for future research to make a significant impact on the theory and research of talent development in sport.

Gould et al. (2001) interviewed 10 former US Olympic champions (6 female, 4 males), one of their coaches, and one parent, guardian, or significant other (30 interviews in total) in an effort to identify the development of psychological characteristics that enabled the athletes to achieve success. Gould et al. suggested that elite athletes possessed the following psychological characteristics: (a) the ability to deal with adversity; (b) confidence; (c) the ability to cope with and control anxiety; (d) the ability to concentrate and block out distractions; (e) competitiveness; (f) intrinsic motivation; (g) hard work ethic, (h) the ability to set goals and achieve them; (i) high trait hope; and, (j) adaptive perfectionism. They also identified four major themes that influenced the development of psychological talent: (a) coach influence, (b) family influence (c) exposure to high level athletic models, and (d) personal growth/maturity. Again, this study highlights the importance of psychological processes and social influences in talent development. Examining the interaction of such processes during particular developmental phases (i.e., adolescence) will further understanding of how athletes

acquired the skills that enabled them to become successful. This descriptive study provides context for the development of theoretical explanations in the future.

Recently, Côté (1999) attempted to develop a theoretical framework that might guide future research via a qualitative study of the influence of the family on talent development in sport. Interviews were conducted with 15 participants from four different families (four athletes, four siblings, four mothers, and three fathers). Three of the athletes were members of the Canadian national rowing team, and the other was a tennis player competing at the Canadian national level. All athletes were 18 years old at the time of the study. Three "stages of sport participation" where the family had a significant influence on developmental processes were identified: the sampling years (age 6-13 years), the specializing years (age 13-15 years), and the investment years (age 15 years and over) (Côté, 1999).

The 'sampling years' for elite athletes were characterized by parents providing opportunities for their children to enjoy sport without intense training, but with an emphasis on fun. All the children within a family participated in various extra-curricular activities, and parents recognized that their child had 'a gift.' During the 'specializing years,' athletes gradually decreased their involvement in extra-curricular activities and focused on one or two sport events. Fun and enjoyment remained as central elements of the sporting experience, but sport-specific development emerged as an important characteristic of the participants' athletic involvement. Parents emphasized school and sport achievement, made financial and time commitments to their child-athlete, and developed a personal interest in the child's sport-involvement, while other siblings acted as role models of work ethic. The 'investment years' reflected increased commitment by the athlete to one sport and parents showed even greater interest in this sport. Play activities were replaced by an enormous amount of practice. At this point, parents helped the athlete fight setbacks such are injury, fatigue, or pressure, and demonstrated different behaviors toward each of their children, which caused younger siblings to show bitterness toward their older sibling's achievement. The process of moving from deliberate play to deliberate practice characterized the transition through sampling, specializing, and investment years.

Côté's (1999) framework is useful because it emphasizes contextual factors, particularly the role of the family in talent development, rather than explicitly examining the psychosocial competencies that athletes develop. Although the study provided a great deal of depth of information, the sample size was small and findings require further corroboration. Furthermore, all the athletes were drawn from individual sports with amateur youth sport structures, where the demands for training and performance may be different to the expectations placed on professional team-sports performers. Côté also acknowledged that the model is based on analysis of intact, middle-class families, which is not representative of all types of family structures. However, because the three-stages of development cover the period of childhood and adolescent development, they may be more descriptive than Bloom's (1985) three phases of learning that cover the entire career of a performer (Côté, 1999). By studying athletes who are only just emerging from their childhood, and adopting a sport-specific focus, Côté argued his framework is more representative of talent development in sport than Bloom's work.

The family has also been shown to fulfill a central role in the development of children's sport talent in England (Kay, 2000). Kay examined family influence on children's sport involvement via interviews with 20 athletes (aged 12-20 years) and their parents from three sports (rowing, tennis, and swimming). She proposed that families support children's talent development by: (a) absorbing the financial impact of sport participation, (b) accommodating sport into family activity patterns; (c) attempting to control the impact of one child's sport involvement on family relationships and emotional life, (d) providing family support, and (e) prioritizing sports in family life. Kay concluded that the development of sports talent in England was very much dependent on family support. This study provided further evidence for the role of the family in talent development, highlighting certain practical strategies that families engage in. However, Kay was unable to delineate a specific developmental period when family support is most critical (perhaps due to the age range of her participants). Adolescent psychology research suggests that the role of the family changes as adolescents become more independent during middle adolescence. Therefore, it may be important to identify the changing role of the family as the adolescent develops.

Brettschneider (1999) examined how high level adolescent athletes coped with the dual demands of school and training. His sample comprised 740 male and female athletes from elite sport schools in Germany. In terms of balancing school and training, athletes in team sports usually trained for 8-12 hours per week while attending 30 lessons per week. Top level athletes reported high perceptions of positive peer and parent relations and had high academic achievement scores. These findings revealed that positive feedback on academic achievement was important in developing a positive self-concept. Brettschneider (1999) concluded that adolescent athletes can endure dual pressure from school and training if coping resources (i.e., parental and peer support, positive feedback) are made available to them and if they make full use of their support functions.

In another major attempt to understand more about the development of talent among adolescents in contemporary society, Csikszentmihayli et al. (1993) conducted a study with 208 US high school students excelling in athletics, arts, mathematics, music, and science. There were 58 athletes (29 male, 29 female) drawn from the 9$^{th}$ and 10$^{th}$ grades of a single school in the greater Chicago area that had "a regional and statewide reputation as an athletic powerhouse" (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993, p. 45). Using a theoretical approach based on the concepts of integration and differentiation, Csikszentmihalyi set out to discover how young people become committed to the development of their talent. Integration and differentiation are opposing poles of a dialectical model used to explain the processes of constancy and change that were perceived to circumscribe the development of expertise. The researchers also proposed that the concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) was related to the growth of talent in terms of a teenager's appetite to seek challenge. That is, the theoretical perspective adopted was based on the premise that people differentiate new challenges into their environment and also integrate new abilities into their repertoire of skills to meet these challenges.

Based on generalizations across all study participants, Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993, pp. 243-255) summarized eight factors associated with talent development. They argued that (a) children must be recognized with skills that are considered useful in their culture; (b) talented students have personality traits conducive to concentration and openness to experience; (c) talent development is easier for those with habits conducive

to cultivating talent; (d) talented teens are more conservative in their sexual attitudes and aware of the conflict between productive work and peer relations; (e) families providing both support and challenge enhance the development of talent; (f) teenagers liked teachers who were supportive and modeled enjoyable involvement in the field; (g) talent development is a process that requires both expressive (strong positive feelings) and instrumental (useful to future goals) rewards; and, (h) a talent will be developed if it produces optimal experiences.

Unfortunately, the athletes that formed part of Csikszentmihalyi et al.'s (1993) sample were not elite performers. The researchers tried to justify the athletic excellence of the single school the athletes were drawn from, explaining that during the five years when the study was conducted (1984-1989), the school reached the final rounds of state championships (presumably meaning play-offs) 20 times. However, individual levels of achievement in sport or future achievements (such as number of college scholarships) were not reported. Therefore, it appears that the athletes in the study were not elite (i.e., international or professional) level performers, which makes it difficult to generalize these findings to adolescents at the national level and beyond.

An alternative approach to talent development was provided by researchers interested in the psychology of practice and learning as they relate to the development of expertise. Ericsson and his collaborators (e.g., Ericsson, 1996; Ericsson & Charness, 1996; Ericsson et al., 1993) proposed a theory for the development of expertise predominantly based on the concept of deliberate practice. Data were collected via diaries of daily activities from talented musicians to identify and analyze their training activities. Ericsson et al. (1993) found that experts reported higher levels of deliberate practice than amateurs, and concluded that the achievement of exceptional skills requires long-term adaptation to the demands and constraints of deliberate practice within a particular domain. Constraints that prevent performers engaging in optimal levels of deliberate practice are related to resources, motivation, and effort. Resource constraints, including time and access to coaches and training facilities must be negotiated by individuals striving to excel. Because deliberate practice does not lead to immediate social or monetary rewards, individuals must overcome motivational constraints. In fact, individuals who engage in deliberate practice are in part motivated by the belief that

deliberate practice leads to improved performance. Finally, deliberate practice is mentally and physically demanding, so individuals must overcome effort constraints.

Ericsson (1996) went on to suggest that about 10 years of preparation was necessary to attain international level. Even the most talented individuals cannot attain international performance in less than about 10 years of preparation, whereas the vast majority of international-level performers have spent considerably longer. Experts invest more hours in deliberate practice per week compared to novices, start engaging in deliberate practice at younger ages, and practice levels are maximized in the latter stages of the developmental path (Ericsson, 1996; Starkes, Deakin, Allard, Hodges, & Hayes, 1996). The total number of hours of deliberate practice a performer engages in is a significant determinant of level of expertise obtained (Ericsson & Charness, 1994). Ericsson (1996) claimed that although late starters require, on average, a shorter period to attain international status, there is a reliable positive correlation between starting age and age for attaining the international level (Ericsson et al., 1993). That is, performers who engage in deliberate practice earlier attain international level earlier because there is supposedly a monotonic relationship between the amount of practice engaged in throughout a career and eventual athletic success (Starkes, Helsen, & Jack, 2001). Durand-Bush and Salmela (2001) questioned the applicability of this prediction in sporting domain, and suggested more research is needed to verify its accuracy.

Evidence for the 10-year rule has been provided in the domains of chess (Simon & Chase, 1973), swimming (Kalinowski, 1985), tennis (Monsass, 1985), mathematics (Gustin, 1985), music (Sosniak, 1985), and soccer (Helsen, Starkes, & Hodges, 1998). Despite evidence for the generalizability of the 10-year rule of necessary preparation, there are still some crucial issues about talent development that are not addressed by this formula. For example, the question is not how long or how hard to practice, but how, what, and when during the developmental sequence to engage in deliberate practice (Singer & Janelle, 1999; Starkes et al., 2001). Furthermore, Ericsson et al. (1993) proposed that deliberate practice is not inherently enjoyable, but athletes have reported that the most relevant and practiced activities they engage in are highly enjoyable (Côté, 1999; Csikszentmihayli et al., 1993; Helsen et al., 1998; Hodges & Starkes, 1996). It is important to acknowledge that Ericcsson et al.'s (1993) original research was not

conducted with athletes. Although Ericsson (1996) admitted that expert performers involved in sports appear to enjoy leisure and social interaction more than solitary activities and deliberate practice, he failed to address the apparent enjoyment athletes' experience from practicing relevant activities. For example, jumps are the most demanding but enjoyable aspect of figure skating practice, and sparring the most important and enjoyable part of wrestling (Starkes et al., 1996).

Ericsson has done an excellent job of revealing that practice is important, and how much practice is required to achieve excellence in the performing arts, and his theory has received some support from research in the athletic domain (Helsen et al., 1998; Hodges & Starkes, 1996). However, the psychosocial competencies that are required to successfully engage in deliberate practice have not been extensively examined. For example, a crucial factor that is not addressed by this model is the role of motivation in determining who will commit to the huge amount of practice time required to become an expert. The motives that underpin the attainment of expertise are not clear, but understanding these motives is fundamental to the study of expertise (Starkes et al., 2001). Additionally, deliberate practice is intended to explain adult expert performance (Ericsson, 1996). Therefore, these findings are not necessarily indicative of the developmental processes children and adolescents experience.

Sociological Research on Talent Development in Sport

Several sociological investigations have provided in-depth insight into social influences on talent development. The childhood sport socialization of 10 elite Swedish tennis players (5 male, 5 female) was examined by Carlson (1988). His results indicated that personal qualifications and early life experiences operate in conjunction with social structures, traditions of the sport, and tennis culture to produce tennis success. A supportive coaching relationship and intense parental interest were both essential environmental factors in the development of elite players. On the psychological level, elite players emphasized that they had gained self-confidence during adolescence primarily due to their successful interactions with their tennis environment. Carlson (1988) concluded that the processes of successful interaction between the individual and the sport environment are of the utmost importance for the development of elite Swedish tennis players.

Stevenson (1990) examined the early careers of international athletes (N = 29, 8 female, 21 male) from Canada (n = 16) and England (n = 13). Athletes were initially introduced to their sport (rugby or field hockey) by parents, teachers, friends, or relatives, although parents were the primary 'sponsors' of this introduction in England. Typically there were gender influences on these patterns of introduction, as fathers introduced their sons to sports they had played (e.g., rugby). During early adolescence, athletes overcame problems related to time and energy commitments by making independent decisions (although they sometimes consulted with significant others), and usually decided to specialize in one sport. As they progressed through adolescence, athletes became engaged in a process of commitment to their sport. This commitment invoked responsibilities to attend practices and display the appropriate attitudes and behaviors once they were there, often because athletes felt obligated to their parents. The processes of commitment were cemented as athletes achieved success in their sport which produced valued identities that were constantly being confirmed by their peers and parents. Stevenson's (1990) work highlights some of the critical processes in the early careers of international athletes.

Another analysis of youth involvement in high performance sport was conducted by Canadian sociologist Peter Donnelly (1993). He interviewed recently retired elite male and female Canadian athletes aged 19-35 years, (N = 45, 16 males, 29 female), the majority of whom participated in individual sports (n = 42). Athletes reported that benefits from their sport participation included travel, prestige, and enjoyment of the sport. Participants also thought they developed self-discipline and confidence, had 'grown up' quicker than their non-athletic peers, could handle stress and deal with crises, and had good time-management skills. Negative aspects of sport involvement included the loss of a sense of childhood, sacrificing family life, parental pressure, problems in social relationships (although athletes maintained friends outside sport), poor athlete-coach relationships, educational problems due to time demands of sport, injuries, and dietary problems. Donnelly (1993) suggested that one of the major factors that contributed to negative sport experiences was the organizational structure of sport in Canada. He concluded that increased financial rewards for sport was creating negative sport experiences and the potential exploitation of young athletes as a modern form of child-labor.

In one of the few studies to examine professional sport developmental experiences, Hill (1993) assessed the youth athletic background of professional baseball players competing in the USA (N = 152) to determine early sport specialization and the influence of their parents and youth coaches. Findings revealed that youth sport coaches proactively promoted off-season competition and training in baseball, and encouraged a long-term commitment to baseball as a career. Parents also appeared to be influential in shaping baseball careers by paying for baseball equipment and participant fees, serving as volunteer coaches, and regularly attending their children's games. Hill's (1993) findings are consistent with other suggestions that talent alone is not sufficient for an athlete to achieve at an elite level; the presence of a supportive parent or guardian also appears to be essential (Bloom, 1985; Carlson, 1988; Côté, 1999; Kay, 2000).

Finally, in another sociological analysis of the professional sport domain, Parker (1996) conducted a season-long ethnographic investigation of the experiences of trainee players at a major professional soccer club in England. Parker (1996) compared the training experiences of footballers to training in other 'trades,' juxtaposing Goffman's (1961) sociological framework of total institutional life with the culture of youth training in a professional football club. He suggested that authoritarianism was used as a form of behavioral control, and that players had negative perceptions of educational provision. This study provided a fascinating account of the typical daily lifestyle of trainee footballers. Unfortunately, it was conducted just before a new structure of professional soccer education in England was introduced, and therefore Parker's (1996) work may be more representative of social structures associated with the previous talent development system.

Summary of Talent Development Literature

Taken together, the summarized research reveals the importance of psychological characteristics and social influences in the development of athletic success over the life-span. Investigations of talent development in sport have mostly taken the form of descriptive qualitative research accounts. Qualitative researchers have been encouraged to move beyond the descriptive ordering of their findings toward the generation of theory (Morse, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The absence of significant theoretical developments may be considered as a limitation of current research on talent

development in sport. To date, investigations have revealed the importance of social factors and certain psychological attributes. However, previous studies have lacked cultural sensitivity, having mainly been limited to US samples. Furthermore, limited attention has been paid to understanding the specific nature of interactions between psychological characteristics and social influences within professional sport contexts. Therefore, the question of what psychosocial competencies successful athletes acquire during adolescence as they aspire to become professional athletes requires further attention.

# CHAPTER 4:

# METHODOLOGY

Grounded Theory (GT; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was selected as the most suitable methodology for the creation of a qualitatively derived theory of adolescent talent development in soccer. Glaser and Strauss (1967) initially developed GT and it was elaborated on in subsequent works (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). The approach was developed as a contrast to the *a priori* theoretical orientation that was popular in sociology in the 1960s. As an alternative, Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed that theories should be grounded in data collected from the field. Glaser and Strauss had differences of opinion over the conceptualization of GT in recent years, leading Glaser (1992) to launch vitriolic attacks against Strauss. Despite their differences, both Glaser and Strauss have continued to contribute to the development of GT.

The approach to GT described by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998), was used in the present study because it offers a clear conceptual outline that enables researchers to develop a theory grounded in the data collected. Strauss and Corbin's approach is pragmatic and perhaps more prescriptive than Glaser's work, which made it appealing to a neophyte grounded theorist. Most significantly though, Strauss and Corbin's approach is based on a philosophical perspective grounded in symbolic interactionism (Dewey, 1922), which is coherent with my philosophical assumptions, and consistent with alternate research paradigms (Guba, 1990; Hoshmand, 1989). Annells (1996) suggested Strauss and Corbin's version of grounded theory is moving toward a postmodern approach (that may include the interpretive-critical paradigm). Therefore, the selection of Strauss and Corbin's approach reinforces the internal coherence of this study.

Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) used the term GT to describe a theory that was derived from data systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. The approach follows the principles of emergent design. Specifically, the researcher does not begin with a preconceived theory in mind, but instead begins with an area of study that allows theory to emerge from the data. For example, the present investigation started with an interest in adolescent talent development in sport, an area that does not have a great

deal of theoretical understanding. GT provides a set of logically consistent data collection and analytic procedures aimed at developing theory. An essential feature of GT is an initial inductive analytical process involving dynamic interplay between data collection, analysis, and comparison. As data are collected, they are analyzed for emergent theoretical categories, which are systematically returned back into the collection of data and analyzed further for their interrelationships and meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Analysis begins almost immediately after data are first collected. Data collection does not cease until theoretical saturation is reached (i.e., new data cease to yield new information). Before then, analytic techniques continue to generate new hypotheses that direct researchers to other valuable sources of data.

Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) suggested that grounded theorists are not so much interested in individual actors, but are more concerned with discovering reciprocal patterns of action/interaction with changes in conditions, either internal or external to the process itself. Indeed, "Grounded theory is a transactional system, that is, it allows you to study the interactive nature of events" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 159). Given that the purposes of this study were to investigate the processes experienced by adolescent soccer players in the pursuit of becoming professionals, the provision within GT to focus on processes of change and interactions between complex subjective realities of individuals within collective structural organizations made it appealing.

Qualitatively Derived Theory

GT is based on the premise that theory at various levels is generally indispensable for deeper knowledge of social phenomena (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theories can take many forms, varying in terms of their sophistication, structure, and modes of derivation (Morse, 1997). Some theories are highly conceptual, with broad applicability and scope, whereas other theories are more parsimonious (Hage, 1972). Numerous definitions of theory exist. Some describe stringent lists of theory components, where theory is represented by "logistically interconnected sets of propositions from which empirical uniformities can be derived" (Merton, 1967, p. 39). More general descriptions characterize theory as "any general set of ideas that guide action" (Flinders & Mills,

1993, p. xii). The theory developed in the present study is closer to the first definition, following Strauss and Corbin (1998) who made the following suggestion:

> *Theory denotes a set of well-developed categories (e.g., themes, concepts) that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant social, psychological, educational, nursing, or other phenomenon. These statements of relationship* explain who, what, when, where, why, how, and with what consequences an event occurs (p. 22, emphasis in original).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) differentiated between formal (concept-focused) theories, and substantive (topic-focused) theories. Substantive theories are more specific to group and place, whereas formal theories are less specific, and can be applied to a wider range of disciplinary concerns and problems (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The aim of the present study was to develop a substantive theory. This type of theory reveals structures of knowledge and intricately linked concepts among stages and phases of a process (Morse, 1997). Such theories are process-bound, not extending beyond the scope of the phenomenon which this study represents (i.e., adolescent talent development in soccer), and are only generalizable to other contexts and other participants experiencing similar phenomena (Morse, 1997). In summary, qualitatively derived theory is systematically developed from empirical data and the analytic practices of synthesizing, theorizing, and confirming.

Participants

Sampling is not just about people, but also about settings, events, and processes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In GT theoretical sampling represents the selection of participants based on the evolving theoretical relevance of emerging concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As such, participants were selected for inclusion in this study based on the possibility that each participant could expand the richness of the data collected. Although sampling traditionally tends to become more purposeful and focused as research advances (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the sampling procedures used in this study were focused from the outset. That is, a specific group of participants was identified at the start of the project. Canadian and English players were chosen on the grounds of pragmatism

and cross-cultural comparability following a similar sampling process employed by Stevenson (1990) in his study of the early career development of international athletes.[2]

In total, 46 participants were formally interviewed to gather data for this study. Twenty adolescent Canadian international soccer players (M age = 16.8 years, SD = 1.7) (participants 1-20) were formally interviewed. Of the Canadian players, 17 were born in Canada, two in Africa, and one in Europe. There were two defenders, 11 midfield players, four strikers, and three goalkeepers in the sample. Four of the Canadian participants attended university, with the remainder either in high school or taking correspondence courses. A further 14 adolescent soccer players (M age = 16.2 years, SD = 0.9) employed by professional soccer clubs in England were formally interviewed, along with six professional youth-level coaches. Of the English-based players, 13 were born in the British Isles (one in Wales, two in Northern Ireland, and 10 in England), and one was born in Australia. There were three defenders, four midfield players, three strikers, and four goalkeepers. All of the English participants attended vocational college as part of their soccer scholarships, and 10 reported completing their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations at High School (aged 16). Finally, six former and current professional soccer players with professional and/or international playing experience in Canada and Europe (M age = 25.2 years, SD = 3.1) also participated in this study during the latter stages of theory development.

Adolescent participants were invited to be in the study if they were currently competing at professional and/or international levels at the time of this study. An elite Canadian athlete was defined as a player who was competing at international level competition and had participated in soccer for at least two years (cf. Feltz & Ewing, 1987). Elite soccer players in England were defined as athletes who were professionally employed as soccer players and had played within the youth development system of a professional soccer club for at least two years. Coaches were included in this study if they were current international or professional coaches. Participants in confirmatory interviews (i.e., the former/current players) had played with a youth development or

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[2] It should be noted that although participants in the second sample were from different countries within the British Isles, they were all members of professional soccer clubs competing in the English professional league structure, and therefore will be referred to as English.

professional club in North America and/or Europe for at least two years. The final sample of participants represents some of the most talented male soccer players for their age in their respective countries and therefore deserving of the elite descriptor. It was deemed important that all the participants were operating in the most elite environments available to provide maximum insight into the developmental processes experienced in high performance soccer.

Procedure

The main phase of field work for this study was carried out during a three-month period in the summer of 2000. In addition to the fieldwork trips, other data were collected (i.e., interviews, observations, documentary evidence) throughout the course of the investigation. In accordance with the principles of GT, there was on-going interaction between data collection and analysis as both fieldwork and deskwork progressed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data collection can be broken down into three main phases. Canadian players were interviewed between June 14th and August 7th, 2000. Canadian data were mainly collected via two fieldwork trips, the first to Toronto (June 14-17, 2000), and the second to Montreal (August 4-7, 2000). The second phase of data collection was conducted with English players and coaches from August 15-27, 2000. Third, at intermittent periods from October 3rd, 2000 to January 31st, 2002, six confirmatory second-round interviews were conducted in Canada (in British Columbia and Alberta).

At times it was impossible to analyze each interview transcript before the next interview, as was the case in Canada when, on one occasion, five participants were interviewed on a single day at a national team camp. However, there were suitable breaks between each data collection trip to initially analyze emerging themes. During the final stages of theory development, informal confirmatory interviews were conducted with older athletes who strived to be professional soccer players in their youth. These second-round interviews helped add to the depth and variability of the data collected. These players were able to provide alternative examples by reflecting on their own experiences as a youth soccer player, and comment on evolving theoretical interpretations.

Gaining access. Canadian participants were solicited from two national youth team squads, and English players from soccer academies of three Premier League clubs

and one first division soccer club in England. The head coach of each respective team was sent an information letter (Appendix 1.0), and he contacted me if he was willing to allow me to attend a training camp for recruitment and interview purposes. Participants were then solicited in each setting. There is often a guarded attitude toward outsiders within professional/international sport environments, so it was necessary to comply with the gatekeepers (i.e., coaches, academy directors) as much as possible. An extract from the fieldwork diary describing one problem faced during this entry phase in is contained in Appendix 2.0.

Some coaches/academy directors facilitated the solicitation process, assisting in the selection of participants, whereas others allowed oral solicitation of participants. In each setting I was introduced to the various teams, and my presence explained. Oral solicitation was conducted in team meetings by giving players the information letter (Appendix 3.0) and a pencil, whereupon they were asked to write their name on the letter. The purposes and demands of the study were explained, and those participants willing to be interviewed were instructed to write a check mark next to their name. Each information letter was collected, and those who indicated their willingness to participate were contacted to arrange an interview time. The oral solicitation procedure was implemented at two settings. In the other settings, coaches took a more active role in the solicitation process. I asked these coaches to identify their starting players, team captains, team leaders, and (in England) players with international experience. The coaches then arranged an interview time for each player. With these players it was made clear that their participation in the interview was entirely voluntary, and if they did not want to participate there would be no negative consequences, and that their respective coaches or academy directors would not be informed of this decision. No players declined to be interviewed as this point.

Interview Data

Interview guide. The interview guide was broadly based on a series of questions used by Vernacchia et al. (2000) in a previous investigation examining psychosocial characteristics of elite (adult) track and field athletes. Using these basic questions as a guide, and to ensure richness of responses, Rubin and Rubin's (1995) guidelines for in-

depth interviews were followed. That is, three types of questions were used: main questions, probe questions, and follow-up questions. Main questions initiated conversation, whereas probe questions helped deepen the interviewer's understanding of the participant's experiences and enhance the richness of the data collected. Follow-up questions were used to pursue issues raised during the interview process and to summarize interpretations and understandings. Therefore, the initial interview guide was developed using previous literature, methodological advice, and refined via three pilot interviews (see below).

The final interview guide (Appendix 4.0) represents all the questions formulated and asked during the entire data collection process. Some of the guiding interview questions were refined as the study progressed. For example, in Montreal I noticed during my observations of training that the players seemed quite nervous and especially concerned with making a mistake. As a result, I included a question regarding responses to mistakes in training and international games in the interview guide. Similarly, at the first club in England I visited, a participant told me he would be interested in how much players at other clubs were enjoying their experience, and how satisfied they were with their progress. I thought these were interesting issues, so I included questions about them in subsequent interviews. However, it soon became apparent that these questions did not subsequently yield much in the way of valuable data, so I stopped asking them. The same process was employed for the development of an interview schedule for the coaches. Initial questions were assimilated into the coaches' interview guide (Appendix 5.0) by modifying and adapting the players' interview guide.

An interview guide was not used for the six informal confirmatory interviews. Instead, participants were asked to describe their background and experience in soccer. The interviewer probed for details and generally tried to obtain an understanding of how these participants achieved success at the professional level, and when their careers reached a plateau with respect to competitive level. Particular attention was paid to playing experiences during middle adolescence. After this initial conversation, the former/current players were presented with the evolving theoretical model and asked if

they could locate or identify any of their own experiences within the framework. Their comments were used to help refine the model into its final form.

Pilot interviews. Three pilot interviews were conducted to assist with the development of the interview guide. The first pilot interview was conducted with a 24 year-old male professional soccer player from Canada. The second interview was conducted with a 26 year-old female soccer player who had competed at the international level for Canada. A female was selected during the pilot stage to help determine whether or not the talent development experiences of females were similar to their male counterparts. This pilot interview identified several complex issues involved in talent development in female soccer that were beyond the scope of the current investigation. The third pilot interview was conducted with a 19 year-old male university soccer player. The purposes of the pilot interviews were to assist in the development of the interview guide, and refine some interviewing techniques. After each interview, participants were invited to evaluate the interview questions, and discuss their perceptions of the entire process. This feedback was then used to further develop the interview guide.

Formal interviews. Formal interviews ranged in length from 25 to 70 minutes, lasting an average of 30 minutes with players, and 45 minutes with coaches. Standard informed consent procedures were completed before each interview. Interviewing can be conceptualized as having a conversation with a purpose (Denzin, 1970; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose of the conversation was not to standardize every interview to elicit responses within a standard format for comparison (Bannister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994). Rather, a semi-structured format was used based on the inventory of questions. Semi-structured interviews give the researcher and respondent more flexibility than the structured interview, allowing both 'actors' to follow any interesting avenues that emerge during the conversation. The main assumption underlying the use of semi-structured interviews is that responses have some significance and 'reality' to participants beyond the bounds of the particular interview (J.A. Smith, 1995). Responses are part of participants' ongoing self-story and represent a manifestation of their social world, and it is this psychological reality that the researcher is interested in understanding (J.A. Smith, 1995).

Informal interviews. Several informal interviews were also conducted to add to the depth of information collected. These informal interviews were conducted with a variety of people involved in soccer, including sports agents, soccer coaches, professional and international players, and soccer administrators. In particular, I talked informally with several Canadian A-license/international level coaches throughout the study, including six international level Canadian coaches at each of the fieldwork settings. Typically these conversations about talent development took place over dinner and on the training field. I also engaged in additional informal conversations with locally based A-license level coaches who were not currently coaching at the international level. Although these conversations are not presented as formal data (i.e., 'raw' data extracts), they provided a valuable source of background information and assisted with the development of my interpretations as the study progressed.[3]

Developing rapport. The researcher entering a setting does so in order to take part in the lives of participants and listen to their explanations for their actions. In essence, "this involves a partnership between the investigator and the informant" (Holloway, 1997, p. 62). The notion of partnership revolves around issues of reciprocity, rapport, and trusting relationships (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Sparkes, 1998). The development of trust and rapport between participants and researcher is crucial if investigative measures are to be fruitful (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) proposed that it is inconceivable that researchers can learn important information from people without rapport because "rapport is tantamount to trust, and trust is the foundation for acquiring the fullest, most accurate disclosure a respondent is able to make" (p. 79).

Given the importance of developing trust and rapport in order to collect credible data, it was important that I invested time and effort into developing relationships with the participants. Initially, I tried to establish prior contact with all of the coaches in the sample, emphasizing any mutual acquaintances wherever possible. My lifelong involvement in soccer facilitated a number of connections with coaches and players. For

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[3] These informal interviews were not tape-recorded and therefore are not presented as formal data. Canadian coaches were informally interviewed to help contextualize the comments of the Canadian players.

example, one coach had been a senior professional at the team where I played my youth soccer, and several Canadian players knew (of) me from my involvement in soccer. Such ties allowed me to promote my insider status as a former soccer player of proven worth, and this was useful in the process of developing rapport. I was recognizable to the participants as one of 'them' and given my background in the sport, I knew how to act in culturally appropriate ways. The racial composition of the sample was relatively homogeneous given that 90% of the players were Caucasian. As a white male, it was unlikely that any issues of race or gender negatively influenced relationships. In short, my appearance, speech, and behaviors appeared to be acceptable to participants (cf. Holt & Sparkes, 2001).

Despite the apparent credibility of myself as a research instrument, the process of establishing rapport in the first few minutes of an interview is a crucial and particular task. It may vary from participant to participant, depending on the researcher's prior knowledge of the person being interviewed. I made particular efforts to establish rapport during the first few moments of each interview. Following Côté's (1999) work with young athletes and their families, it was deemed important to create a positive atmosphere in which participants felt comfortable and were motivated to express their views. Each interview commenced with an explanation of my soccer career in the UK and how I had failed to make the full professional grade. At the conclusion of my story, I explained that I was conducting this study to provide information that would have helped me and others like me to become more successful in soccer. This personal disclosure was presented in order to help each participant feel at ease in the interview situation, and to emphasize that he (as the successful adolescent soccer player) was the expert. Early in the interview I tried to help the participants feel at ease by talking in a relaxed manner, perhaps making a joke, and sincerely thanking them for their assistance. Throughout the interview I engaged in verbal and non-verbal tracking and bridging techniques such as nodding, thanking, and encouraging.

Observational Data

Observation was used to augment and corroborate the primary interview data. Observational analysis was undertaken during fieldwork trips to national and professional

training camps. In addition to these fieldwork observations, other (background) data were gathered via more general observations, such as watching adolescent players on television, observing local soccer games (e.g., 2000 Alberta under-18 provincial tournament), attending coaching seminars, coaching experiences (e.g., Alberta provincial team camps), and reflections arising from my personal immersion in the culture of elite youth soccer. These observations provided a secondary source of information, often facilitating valuable insights into previous questions and providing new directions to drive the on-going data collection and analysis.

According to Wolcott (1995), observation always faces the problem of what to look at, what to look for, "and the never-ending tension between taking a closer look at something versus taking a broader look at everything" (p. 96). In the current study, this tension was significant as I would typically arrive at a training venue, try to get a general picture of what was going on, examine what the academy/camp was like, and then look for specific incidents. Typically observations included descriptions of settings, training environments, and notes on informal conversations with members of these settings. Ultimately, I entered each setting by taking a broad look at the environment in relation to the foreshadowed research problem that revolved around understanding what it takes to become a professional/international soccer player. Observations were recorded in the fieldwork diary. It must be noted that making such complex observations is a difficult task. At times, I had to cram the entire process into the space of a few hours. At other times I had days to assess and analyze the various situations. Fortunately, having practiced the necessary skills of observation in previous investigations (i.e., Holt & Sparkes, 2001), I had grown accustomed to the processes of observation in the field setting. This data were a valuable source of background information throughout the study.

Documentary-Data

In addition to the observational data, the primary interview data were also supported by analysis of documentary evidence such as technical reports, newspaper cuttings, soccer-magazine articles, media guides, website information, publications from various soccer governing bodies, and autobiographies/biographies of professional players

and coaches. For example, the under-17 Canadian team coach sent me two reports he had submitted to the national coaching executive. In these reports he assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the team, each player, the training camps, and his performance. An academy director in England provided information on the structure of youth academies and guidelines for parents. The documentary evidence file became a vast 'scrapbook' of background data pertaining to the investigation, and was particularly useful for formulating questions and making connections during the earlier stages of the study.

Data Analysis

The system of data management in GT is based on a progression from description, through conceptual ordering, to theorizing (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Description formed the basis for more abstract interpretations of data and theory development. Using the analytic procedures outlined below, the data were organized into discrete categories based on their properties and dimensions, using description to initially elucidate those categories. Conceptual ordering, which is the finishing point for some qualitative studies, was the precursor for theorizing. Conceptual ordering does not constitute a theoretical explanation unless "it is placed in a larger unifying framework" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 21).

It was important to separate the two data sets in order to analyze them for the purpose of cultural comparison. The entire Canadian data were analyzed first using the techniques of microanalysis and open coding (see below). Once the Canadian data had been accounted for, and a variety of descriptive themes developed, the English data were similarly (descriptively) analyzed. As this point every effort was made to allow themes unique to a particular data set to inductively emerge from the data. Constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was a particularly important technique during this stage because it facilitated the comparison of concepts *within* a particular data set as well as *between* the respective data sets. It was important to ensure that raw data extracts included in a concept invoked the same attributes and dimensions.

Once descriptive analysis was complete for both data sets, the task of conceptual ordering leading to theorizing began. The move to the more conceptual and theorizing stages of data analysis involved the formulation of ideas into a logical, systematic, and

explanatory scheme, at the heart of which involves the interplay of making inductions (i.e., deriving concepts) and deductions (i.e., hypothesizing relationships between concepts) (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Axial coding was used during this stage to put the data back together in a coherent manner. First, the Canadian data were placed within a conceptual framework of super-ordinate and sub-ordinate categories which bore intimate relations to each other. Subsequently, the English data were then (deductively) matched with this framework, and new concepts/categories added where the data did not fit. Every effort was made not to 'force' the English data into the existing framework provided by the Canadian data.

Following the conceptual ordering of the data, the final theorizing step was undertaken. Theorizing is based on developing explanations, because only when "concepts are related through statements of relationship into an explanatory theoretical framework [can] the research findings move beyond conceptual ordering to theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 22). Theorizing is an act of constructing that enables researchers to explain events to provide guides to action (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The description – ordering – theorizing approach was facilitated using the requisite coding procedures of GT. Description was mainly achieved using microanalysis and open coding. Conceptual ordering was based on the use of axial coding, whereas theorizing relied on selective coding in conjunction with other selected analytic techniques. A description of each type of coding follows.

Microanalysis. Microanalysis is the detailed, line-by-line analysis used at the beginning of a study to generate initial categories. It is a free-flowing process in which the analyst moves between open and axial coding while engaging in minute examination and interpretation of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I used microanalysis during the fieldwork period in order to facilitate the interaction between data collection and analysis. Microanalysis was largely a descriptive process whereby I paid attention to the possible different meanings participants' words could convey, and tried to understand each participant's unique perspective. However, I also tried to make links between emerging concepts. Engaging in this analysis early in the research process was a valuable procedure, because as data were probed, potential categories emerged and new questions

were posed to participants to explore the dimensions, properties, and connections between those categories.

Open coding. Open coding is the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions discovered (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During open coding (which was completed after the fieldwork period), data were broken down, examined, and compared for similarities and differences to develop a number of concepts. A concept can be defined as a labeled phenomenon or an abstract representation of an event (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As analysis continued, other events were identified, and then through comparative analysis, placed in the same concept (i.e., theme) if they shared common characteristics, or a new concept was created if characteristics differed. Once concepts were developed, certain concepts embracing similar events, actions, and interactions were grouped together under more abstract (i.e., higher level/global) concepts termed categories and sub-categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Discovering categories reduces the overall number of units with which the researcher has to work. Categories have analytic power, with the potential to explain or predict. Categories are groups of concepts derived from the data that represent phenomena which help to answer the question "what is going on here?" In the developed theory, four central (and equally important) categories were identified (labeled Discipline, Commitment, Resilience, and Social Support) to answer the fundamental question addressed in the dissertation, namely: "What does it take to make it as an international/professional soccer player?" Classically a GT study rests around a single core category, but it became clear that at least four main processes appeared to be acting in conjunction in the present study. Therefore, rather than 'force' the data around a central category, it was deemed appropriate to develop a schema of four interacting core categories.

Axial coding. The purpose of axial coding is to reassemble the data that are broken down during open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through axial coding, categories and their related sub-categories in this study were refined to form more precise explanations about the processes of becoming a successful soccer player. Axial coding involved relating categories to subcategories in terms of their properties and dimensions.

In this way, the subcategories provided main categories with greater explanatory power. The axial linking of categories was a conceptual, rather than descriptive process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). At this stage of data analysis, the data were conceptually developed by asking questions related to conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences. *Conditions* are assessed by asking questions of the data such as when, where, why, who, and how? *Actions/interactions* involve identifying strategic responses by individuals to issues or events. *Consequences* are the outcomes of these actions/interactions. The questions are used as part of a coding paradigm (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and they facilitated the development of relational statements between categories, part of the continuing process of theory development. The interactions between categories were explicated through the development of relational statements that linked categories and sub-categories with their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Selective coding. Selective coding is the process of integrating and refining categories to form a larger theoretical scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Although the first step in integration generally involves the selection of a single central category, in this study four central categories were selected because each appeared to play a critical, interacting, yet unique role in the development of adolescent soccer players. The main categories provided the basis of a theoretical framework, whereas the sub-categories explain what the research is about.

During selective coding, decisions were made regarding data saturation. Saturation is the point when new data cease to yield new information (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and is a key element in developing a theory that is grounded in the data. Although it appeared that an adequate level of data saturation had been attained during the fieldwork, certain new questions regarding relationships between the main categories arose during the final data analysis. In an attempt to clarify these relationships between categories, confirmatory interviews with current/former players were conducted to help 'saturate' theoretical connections. Given the inevitable logistical constraints faced in conducting the type of research presented here, it was difficult to return to fieldwork to collect more data to saturate data further. As such, it was deemed that an adequate level of data saturation was achieved based on the relatively large sample size (including

athletes, coaches, and former/current players), observational and documentary data, and the overall richness of the information gathered.

Analytic tools. Inherent within the coding procedures outlined previously are certain techniques that enable the analyst to make theoretical interpretations and form statements of relationship between concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). First, the data were organized into a story line to explain what was apparently going on. Second, diagrams were used throughout the analytic process to visually examine relationships between categories. Third, memos and notes were intermittently reviewed and compared with the emerging theory. Fourth, the emerging theory was compared with previous research and theory in talent development and giftedness to illuminate plausible connections. Finally, using the comparative techniques of "flip-flop" and "systematic comparison of two or more phenomena" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 94-95), I compared adolescent soccer players' careers to the career of a lawyer I knew. This mode of thinking moved me out of an analytic rut, and helped me to develop a better understanding of the role of motivating factors that underpinned the pursuit of a soccer career and how these motives influence talent development. For example, a lawyer learns his/her trade during adulthood, typically aged 25 years or older, whereas a soccer player learns during childhood and adolescence. I wondered, "do lawyers dream about the law during childhood?"; "What factors motivate them to study late nights?"; When will they be rewarded for their many years in higher education?"; "What are the rewards?" I then compared these thoughts to the demands facing adolescent soccer players. In doing so I was able to attain creative analytic insights at a more theoretical level as I sought to link categories together as opposed to simply describing concepts. Such 'far out' comparisons mirror the classic work of sociologist E.C. Hughes, who made comparisons between 'professionals' like psychiatrists and prostitutes (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Methodological Rigor

A myriad of terms are used to refer to 'validity' in qualitative inquiry (Sparkes, 1998), including (but not limited to) trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), strength (Maxwell, 1996), and authenticity (Manning, 1997). Each of these perspectives provides, in essence, criteria for judging 'good' from 'bad' research. The techniques used in the

present study were designed to enhance the *methodological rigor* of the investigation. Such procedures for qualitative investigations can be characterized by properties that have a list-like quality that can be added to or taken away from depending on the context and the purposes of a particular study (Sparkes, 1998). Criteria lists are flexible features that may characterize good versus bad inquiry at any given time and place (Smith & Deemer, 2000). Any particular features that might be put forward as characteristics of good research will be constantly subject to interpretation and reinterpretation as times and conditions change. Consequently, the criteria by which a qualitative research study may be judged is dependent on the particular way a study was carried out, rather than by a pre-ordained set of consistent criteria that are applied across time, settings, and investigations. Drawing on various sources, a number of criteria were selected and appropriate actions taken to enhance the methodological rigor of this study. With regard to the process of inquiry and my desire to generate a plausible interpretation of events I felt the following were important: thick description, reflexivity, triangulation, member-checking.

Thick description. Writing GT is typically more about explaining the relationships between concepts than about the description of people. Glaser (1978) suggested that the credibility of GT is achieved through the integration and relevance of concepts, not by descriptive illustrations as proof. Despite Glaser's concerns, Strauss and Corbin (1998) acknowledged the role of description in the development of theoretical interpretations. As a grounded theorist engaging in his first use of the methodology, I thought it was important in a doctoral thesis to provide a coherent level of description to augment interpretations drawn from the data. As such, in order to assess the adequacy of the level of description provided, the following questions may be asked of the text. First, is enough evidence in the form of explanation of analytic techniques, explication of relational statements between concepts, and 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) provided to enable the reader to judge the researcher's interpretations? Second, are there sufficient quotations from the participants and are their perspectives and voices represented in a fair and balanced manner?

Reflexivity. The subjectivity or sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) of the researcher is seen as a resource for understanding the 'problematic' world he or she is investigating (Sparkes, 1992). Therefore, rather than trying to remove their subjectivity, qualitative researchers attempt to reflexively embrace it so that it can be used as a valuable analytical tool (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Objectivity in GT does not mean controlling variables; rather it means being open and willing to listen "and to 'give voice' to the respondents" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 43). Being a member of various culture-sharing soccer groups in Canada and England was facilitative in terms of developing rapport and trusting relationships during interviews. However, in terms of maintaining analytical distance, it can be difficult for the researcher studying settings that are more familiar "to suspend one's preconceptions, whether they derive from social science or everyday knowledge. One reason for this is one finds it so obvious" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 103).

To assist in developing familiarity with the research settings while maintaining analytical distance and challenging preconceptions, I maintained a reflexive journal that provided an ongoing account of the directions, decisions, and considerations I made during the research process. (An example of the reflective process is included in Appendix 6.0). These reflections encouraged me to refer back and critically examine my own assumptions and actions in a self-conscious and self-aware manner. It acted as a reflexive resource for 'making notes on notes,' enabling me to couple my emerging analysis with observations throughout the study, which in turn helped me to remain attentive to my own behaviors and cognitions as researcher as instrument, asking 'what is going on here?' (cf. Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Wolcott, 1990). The reflexive journal was a useful tool in maintaining a balance between objectivity and subjectivity. As my interpretations developed, I discussed them with my research supervisors who acted as 'critical friends', or played 'devil's advocate', and throughout the project asked hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations (cf. Faulkner & Sparkes, 1999; Holt & Sparkes, 2001). This monitoring process was useful in ensuring the inductive nature of the enterprise. Here, the initial emphasis was on allowing concepts and categories to emerge in situ as the study developed and then

integrating these with relevant theory to provide explanations rather than defining these prior to the study and imposing them on the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Triangulation. Data produced by different collection techniques were incorporated into the study as a means of shedding light on and checking emerging themes, perspectives, and interpretations (Cresswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). That is, technique triangulation (Patton, 1990) was used. Data were primarily collected via formal interviews. Informal interviews, observation, and documentary analysis were used to supplement the primary data. Additionally, coaches' perspectives were gathered in order to help corroborate the information obtained from players.

Member checking. Member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were deemed important to ensure the accuracy of the findings in terms of reporting what happened, that the reality portrayed was recognizable to those living it, and that the participants felt they were represented fairly. This technique was also seen as useful for exploring the reactions of the participants to researcher interpretations of their world. All participants received a transcribed copy of their interview, which they were asked to verify for accuracy and confirm they felt they had been fairly represented. However, it was difficult to complete a full member checking process (i.e., gain further reflexive elaboration on the developing theory) due to the logistical demands of the study (i.e., time and money) and resultant geographical spread of the participants. Nonetheless, attempts were made to re-contact participants by telephone or e-mail at various points throughout the study to seek their views on emergent researcher interpretations. For example, participants were sent copies of the developing model, along with brief explanations of salient processes.

Given that only 20% of the participants provided further comments on the developing theoretical interpretations, it was deemed important to pursue logistically feasible member checking procedures with greater vigor. For example, two locally-based Canadian athletes from the original sample were re-interviewed several times as the theory developed. One English coach from the original sample visited Canada on a coaching contract, and he was also contacted to provide his thoughts on the developing theory. To further overcome some of the concerns regarding member checking, the six

second-round confirmatory interviews were conducted with older current/former soccer players who had experience playing in Canada and England. These interviews provided a source of elaboration and confirmation on developing insights, and were useful when placed in conjunction with the other member checking procedures.

# CHAPTER 5:
# RESULTS

## The Talent Development Environment in Canada

The results of this study should be examined within the context of the talent development environment for soccer available in Canadian society. Physically, socially, and culturally, the context of soccer in Canada has significant implications for the experiences of elite adolescent soccer players. The Canadian Soccer Association (CSA) is primarily responsible for the development of young players. Currently, there is no professional soccer league in Canada, although there are plans for the development of a league in the future (CSA, 2002). As of March 2002, there were four men's professional teams based in Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal, and Toronto, competing in the US-based A-League. The A-league is a standard below Major League Soccer (MLS), which is the premier professional league in North America. However, the MLS does not compare favorably to the top European and South American leagues in terms of quality of play or salary. Furthermore, few players with A-league teams are full-time contracted professional athletes, with most being employed only for the specific duration of the season. As such, these teams are similar to semi-professional teams in Europe. Additionally, there are three Premiere Development League (PDL) teams in Canada based in Okanagan, Calgary, and Thunder Bay. The PDL is mainly designed to prepare US college players for A-league competition. PDL players are not employed on a contract basis; instead they receive accommodation and other living expenses on a seasonal basis. There is also one National Professional Soccer League (NPSL) indoor team in Toronto (indoor teams in Montreal and Edmonton folded during the course of this investigation). To put the relative lack of professional teams in Canada in context, the English professional league system has 92 clubs in a geographical area that is one quarter the size of the Province of Alberta.

In the late 1990s, the CSA commissioned a management consultant firm to conduct an investigation into the feasibility of a national Canadian professional soccer league. It was concluded that a professional league would likely not be feasible from a financial perspective (Adamson, 2001). Nonetheless, the CSA proposed the Canadian

United Soccer League (CUSL), which was meant to be in operation in 2001, but has yet to be implemented (although it is suggested this league will be in operation by 2004: CSA, 2002). Numerous arguments between the CSA and existing professional clubs have been conducted through the television and print media, and the financial plan for the CUSL has been severely criticized by the existing professional clubs. At the time of writing, the future of a national professional soccer league in Canada looks uncertain.

Given the lack of professional competition, the national team programs of the CSA fulfill a vital role in the development of players. In April 2000, the CSA launched a major initiative designed to improve player development titled '*A Blueprint for Success*' (CSA, 2000). The main agenda of the blueprint was to create and support national developmental teams for males and females aged 15 to 18 years, in annual age groupings. The blueprint proposed that eight teams would compete internationally at least twice a year against some of the best teams in the world in order to improve player skills and overall long-term athlete preparation (CSA, 2000). The overall goal of the CSA program is to develop players who will be capable of helping the Canadian senior national team compete at a world class level.

The CSA program is designed to select the best 200 young male and female Canadian players and give them opportunities to develop at the international level. Provincial associations play a key role in the development of younger players (up to 17 years approximately), identifying talented athletes, providing access to qualified coaches, and competitive opportunities at the national (i.e., inter-provincial) level. Players are selected by their respective provincial associations to attend one of five national training centers in Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax. The Alberta and Nova Scotia sites act as regional hubs for the Atlantic and Prairie regions (CSA, 2000).

One of the most significant problems faced by the CSA in developing soccer players is that soccer is not a major sport in the context of Canadian society. The 'second class' nature of soccer was highlighted by Denis Coderre, the Minister for Amateur Sport in Canada, who said "There are 700 000 soccer players in Canada but they don't win anything, so why should we put any money into it?" (Fieldwork diary entry from TV interview, July 10th, 2001). Coderre was referring to the huge numbers of children who

play soccer at the grassroots level, and the failure of national teams to win medals at the Olympics. Coderre's comment reflects the relative lack of importance assigned to soccer in Canada. Interestingly, the senior women's national team has competed at the last two World Cup finals, and the senior men won the Gold Cup tournament in 2000, and finished third in 2002 (a competition for national teams from the Caribbean, Central America, and North America), but neither team has recorded Olympic success. Soccer is a marginal sport played by many Canadians during childhood, but adult soccer lacks professional league status and political support at federal levels.

Another major hindrance imposed upon the Canadian soccer system is the physical environment. During winter months (November – March) outdoor soccer is only possible in the western coastal regions of British Columbia. For all other Canadian provinces, the outdoor season operates from early May to the end of August. Indoor soccer is a popular alternative during the winter months, but this small-sided version of the outdoor game played in hockey-sized arenas has many different rules that require different skills. Holger Osieck, the current head coach of the Canadian men's national team, has said that the indoor game is no substitute for 'real' soccer, and has a saying that "artificial surfaces create artificial soccer players" (Fieldwork diary entry from interview with Canadian A-license coach). Despite the popularity of indoor soccer at the amateur level, there was not enough interest to support indoor professional soccer in either of the Canadian cities that were awarded NPSL franchises (Edmonton and Montreal).

The findings of this study are described via four conceptually-ordered psychosocial competencies (Discipline, Commitment, Resilience, and Social Support). Psychosocial competencies refer to athletes' awareness of the psychological processes and social influences inherent in their talent development context, and their understanding of the appropriate deployment of psychological and social skills for the purpose of enhancing their career development in sport.

## Discipline

Discipline, in the context of this study, can be regarded as "training or a way of life aimed at self-control and conformity" (Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language, 1985). The development of an adolescent soccer player is dependent in many

ways on his ability to become self-regulatory in the pursuit of his ambitions. The category of discipline involves displaying self-controlled professional behavior in practice and competition settings. Discipline is characterized by conforming dedication and willingness to sacrifice (Figure 1).

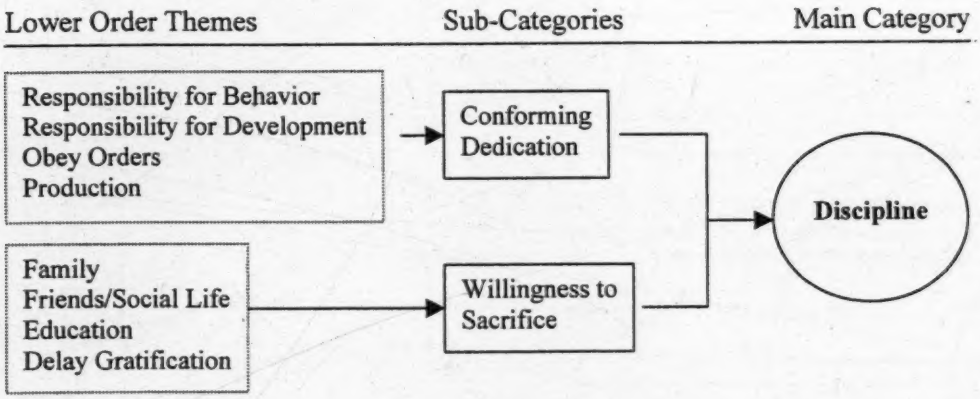


Figure 1. Conditions describing discipline (Canadian data).

Conforming Dedication

Conforming dedication is a form of self-control that involves constant striving for improvement via the training of technical, physical, and psychosocial abilities. Canadian soccer players learned to become dedicated to their sport in a manner which conformed to their coaches' expectations for the behavior of a professional (or international) athlete. In a psychological sense, this concept of conforming dedication was expressed when players demonstrated their ability to take personal responsibility for their behavior and development. Players also showed conforming dedication by obeying their coaches' orders and ultimately producing the desired behavioral responses that reflected the sought-after performance level.

Responsibility for behavior. Data revealed that coaches expected players to be personally responsible for their behavior and to display a sense of independence. For example, coaches expected players to be able to survive independently from their family unit. Participant number eight (P8) reflected on time spent playing in Europe: "For me it

wasn't really too much of a problem because I am more of an independent person, and I always was, and I probably always will be!" It seemed like the most successful players also had an independent, almost stubborn streak, as P1 explained, "I try not to let anybody else influence me but me. I do the things that I know that are positive for me. I make decisions based on anything that I can do to make me better."

Personal responsibility was demonstrated via both on- and off-field behaviors. P16 understood the expectations he was expected to meet and said it was important that he did not "get carried away. Be responsible. It's the same thing on the field as off the field. You have to be responsible on the field, and you have to be responsible off the field." Many of the players expressed the importance of displaying good behavior because they were members of the Canadian national team. P12 said:

> Off the field, you know some things are wrong, and some things are right. Don't do the wrong things. So if you are with a group of friends, and one of them is going to take [steal] something, don't stay with your friends, stay far away, so when the police come they get him you are not there.

These concepts reflect developing a sense of conformity to the expectations of coaches and the development of personal responsibility for behavior. Although coaches may have established certain standards for on- and off-field behavior, it was up to players to meet these standards independently of the coaches and to be personally responsible for their actions.

Responsibility for development. Players learned to realize that they are personally responsible for their development as a soccer player as well as their behavior. For example, P11 explained he had learned how to become persistent in striving for personal improvement: "You must make your goals higher, and if you reach those goals, make them higher and higher again. Keep on pushing yourself with what you reach for, just keep on pushing." This example shows that he was personally responsible for pushing himself to reach his goals. P20 also realized the importance of pushing himself, and remarked, "It doesn't matter how good you are, you can always improve. You can always do better, you're never perfect." Similarly, P9 said, "no matter how far you go, provincial, national, if you go overseas… don't lay off your training because then you get

in trouble." These comments reflect the development of a personal responsibility toward training, and therefore career development.

On average, players trained for 12 hours per week with their respective teams. It appeared that the players also trained *alone* (in addition to the team training sessions) to improve themselves. For example, P14 said, "I just keep doing all the running on the days when I don't practice: sit ups, push ups, just trying to stay fit." P4 followed a similar regimen and described the perseverance he had learned by being personally responsible for his development: "Fitness. Fitness and strength, physical strength… You have to just keep practicing, keep shooting, keep running, keep whatever, just to get your level up and up and up." In addition to physical work, players practiced skills outside organized training environments. For example, by virtue of being in a challenging environment with a professional club in Germany, P1 realized other players at his club were better at the skill of volleying the ball, so he took it upon himself to practice more:

> All those players over there knew how to do it, but I didn't know, so I had to finally figure out how to do it. Shooting with my left foot is something I couldn't necessarily do very well before, but now I'm pretty comfortable with, and just the little things that make you complete, just those little things are what I have to work on.

Practicing skills and engaging in physical training away from organized team practices reflect players' adoption of personal responsibility for their development, rather than expecting others (i.e., coaches) to shoulder this responsibility.

Obey orders. Players learned to understand the specific nature of their coaches' expectations. One important aspect of being a professional player was to follow the coaches' instructions. P13 said: "As a professional you should be able to play any position the coaches tell you to, and you should have no problem with it." P1 recalled that when he was playing in Germany, "I was aware of the fact that I was going to do whatever it takes to please the coaches, so I did it their way." P4 thought obeying orders was one of the responsibilities of a professional player, and in reference to his professional club in England, said:

> They pay my wages, they tell me what to do, they've taken a risk bringing a Canadian over there, so you do what they tell you. They tell you to play wide, or play sweeper, you do it to the best of your ability.

To become a professional, players appear to believe that they must do what they are told, accept directions willingly, and carry out the coaches' instructions. This was reinforced by P7 who said, "During a game, I'm focusing on my task, what my job is, what instructions the coach has given me."

Production. In order to be valuable in elite soccer environments, players must be able to produce (i.e., produce an effective performance with the desired result/outcome in the competitive setting). For example, a striker 'produces' by scoring goals (P4), a goalkeeper must "make big time saves" (P8), because "that's the way professional sport is, you have to produce" (P1). Players understood the importance of being able to produce in a game situation, and realized this was the setting where they would be judged. Regardless of skill level, if an adolescent player cannot have a telling impact on a game he will not have a long career.

> You have to produce. I remember in one of the first games I got into, I was on a breakaway, I beat the goalie, and then the defender went behind the goalie to the goal line and I tried to put it between his legs. The coaches got mad and wanted to sit me, and I just had to think to myself, 'what am I doing?' I realized, just play the game and produce, because all they want is production. So I had to learn how to produce (P1).

From this experience, P1 learned to understand the importance of production. 'Showboating' could be considered the opposite to the demand to produce on the field. Indeed, players soon learn that production is far more important than looking good in professional soccer. P4 explained his role when playing in the English first division: "My job is to just go out and play solid, play a solid game, don't make mistakes, and be as professional as I can." Being professional in this context means consistently producing a disciplined performance, as P11 said, "I think professionals are always at their top level. I mean, they will have their bad days, but when they do they are always still up there, near the top."

Willingness to Sacrifice

Players were expected to possess self-control to sacrifice certain factors associated with 'normal' adolescence in order to adhere to the demands of a disciplined professional sport career. Willingness to sacrifice may not represent completely volitional free choices, but players appeared to understand the range of alternatives they faced and they were able to make informed decisions. Sacrifices were made because they were perceived as a necessary part of acquiring the discipline of an elite athlete. That is, athletes were willing to make sacrifices in order to achieve their ambitions. It is important to note that the factors described below can be considered as sacrifices because they were valued activities. In other words, for something to be considered a sacrifice it must have been valued in the first place. Players reported sacrificing family, friends, social life, and education; often delaying gratification in order to realize the benefits of these sacrifices at a future date.

Family. Time spent with immediate family is often sacrificed due to soccer commitments. For example, P6 said:

> When I was just a young kid, we were going to have a cottage on the lake, a two hour drive away from home, but I played on Saturdays, and my brother played on Sundays, so it was like, when were we ever going to go?

During adolescence a player may decide to miss certain family occasions of his own accord, as P9 explained: "I'll be missing my family reunion coming up in August because of a training camp." P14 summed up the family sacrifice: "Not being able to see my family because of soccer and taking trips is very difficult. Basically you have to sacrifice everything including your family." P3, who moved to England at the age of 15 years, reflected, "Moving away from your family is difficult. The biggest thing I've had to overcome is moving away from home." Other players who had lived in Europe had similar comments: "Personal sacrifices, like leaving home are tough" (P8); and, "Being away from my family was tough. When I was in England, I was living by myself for five weeks. It was tough" (P5).

Friends/Social life. Elite soccer players sacrificed their blossoming social life to play and train. It was "a big sacrifice for Canadians to move from their home when they

are really young, to go over to England. It's tough, because it's not a normal life" (P3). P8 thought he "missed out of the normal years of growing up" including his class graduation, and felt that he grew up "a bit quicker" than his classmates. P7 said:

> I often think about this. Growing up, I was always playing soccer, always training, trying to get better, going to training sessions. I don't know if that I sacrificed growing up, my childhood. I definitely had fun, but I don't really feel I had a childhood.

P2 thought the biggest sacrifice he made related to his friends:

> I'd say it would have to be the social life type thing. When all your friends have a party to go to, and it's the main thing, and you have a game the next day, and you have to say 'no.' A lot of times that happens, and you just have to accept it.

Finally, P17 summarized his situation:

> My social life isn't exactly as good as it could be, because I can't go out because I've got soccer. I think that's a pretty big sacrifice. If you are good at it, go for it if you really want it, but if you want it you will have to make sacrifices.

Education. Although national team training camps in Canada are usually organized around school schedules, this is not always the case, and often players are required to be absent from school or university at important times in the academic calendar. Sacrificing aspects of education is a significant challenge for high-school age players as they seek to strike a balance between school and sport. However, for many players in this sample it seems that school is sacrificed for the sake of sport. P9 remarked, "I've sacrificed my focus on school quite a bit, I think my marks would be better if I wasn't in soccer." P12 said, "My parents allowed me to go away from school for 10, 20 days, and it's hard, hard, hard." P9 overcame the problems he faced by "asking some of the other players for help. For example, with my French homework, I'll ask some of the players who speak French for help, and so I can get my homework done." School was also an issue if the player moved to Europe. In England, for example, adolescent players are required to complete college courses, or Canadians may take high school credit

courses via correspondence to finish their diploma. P3 thought that, "you have to drop out of school to move over there [Europe]," but P5 said, "I've graduated, I took correspondence. Actually I found it easy. I had a year to do it, to do one course, and I finished it in about two months." It was possible to maintain schoolwork and a soccer career, but the time demands of international soccer created pressure on education, which was frequently sacrificed to allow for continual self-improvement in soccer.

Delay gratification. Successful soccer players appeared to realize that the rewards for their willingness to sacrifice were not gained immediately. The concept of delaying gratification helps explain why adolescent soccer players were prepared to make sacrifices during adolescence. For example, P6 justified the effort he was putting into becoming a soccer player by saying, "how I look at it is that I've got one shot to do this, whereas I've got a lot of years to do a lot of other things." P7 realized he would experience the rewards of his current hard work in the future: "You've got to enjoy it, but you reap the benefits after, after you stop playing. I think when you are 29 or 30, then you'll enjoy life." Similarly, P8 discussed how he was prepared to work hard now if it meant becoming a professional player later:

> I just figured I'll live my fun life after I retire from soccer, instead of living a fun life minimally at this age. After, when I have a nice family and everything, I can go round the world, have fun, do whatever I want, when other people at that time are breaking through with companies or whatever. I figure later on in life it will just be that much better.

The notion of delaying gratification reflects the acquisition of self-discipline and a willingness to sacrifice, and is closely linked to the strength of adolescent players' commitment. It appears that players are willing to delay gratification because of the importance and power of their commitment to soccer.

## Commitment

Commitment is used here to represent the motivational forces behind the persistent pursuit of a professional soccer career (also see Kelley, 1983; Renzulli, 1978, 1986; Rusbult, 1988; Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993). Commitment is conceptualized as the catalyst for talent development. Findings suggest

that players must have a strong determination to succeed that is manifest in their behavior and actions. Commitment was represented through the possession of motives that provided sources of energy to pursue a soccer career and strategically planned career goals that directed these sources of energy. An overview of the category of commitment is presented in Figure 2.

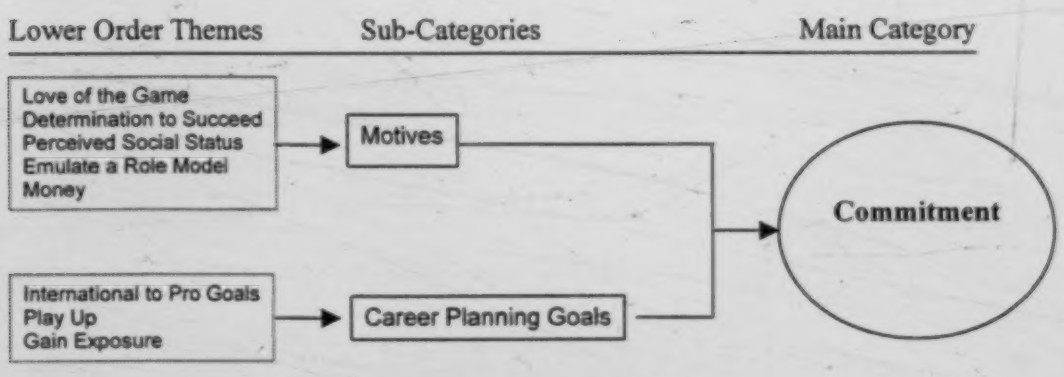


Figure 2. Conditions describing commitment (Canadian data).

## Motives

Motives represent internal and external factors that act upon motivation, which can be considered as the initiation, direction, intensity, and quality of behavior (Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001). Motives are sources of energy, the reasons *why* adolescent players are prepared to commit to the hours of extended practice required to become an elite performer. The motives of Canadian soccer players were based on the following factors; (a) the love of the game, (b) determination to succeed, (c) perceived social status, (d) emulating role models, and, (e) financial rewards.

Love of the game. The intrinsic love of the game of soccer provided a powerful motivational force that enabled players to be committed to elite adolescent soccer. Players described a childhood love of soccer, and becoming a professional soccer player represented the ultimate realization of their love of the game. P20 described his passion to play the game, "It's just my dream to play. I've grown up watching soccer, and it's my dream." The notion of realizing a soccer dream appears to be an ephemeral concept that

may be provoked for Canadian athletes by TV images rather than first hand exposure to major professional leagues in Europe or South America. Also, some international coaches attempted to demonstrate their love of the game in order to provoke similar responses from the players. For example, one of the national team coaches deliberately chose a small private school in Quebec (over an hour away from Montreal airport) so that the players could be immersed in soccer for the duration of the camp. In this setting, he provided players with soccer videos, magazines, and constantly talked about their soccer experiences and developments in world soccer because he wanted the players to like soccer as much as he did (fieldwork dairy entry).

Determination to succeed. A successful adolescent soccer player requires intense determination and an insatiable desire to succeed. Many players thought their high level of determination separated them from less successful players. For example, P6 thought the factor that contributed most to his career was his "will to succeed, definitely. I have this desire just to be the best." Similarly, P17 remarked, "I always want to be the best in what I can do. I always want to keep going further and further." P1 explained how his determination to succeed was based on a strong belief in his abilities, "I'm the type of person who thinks nothing can stop me but myself, so I think I can go as far as some of the players who you see who are the top in the world. I never think otherwise." Determination to succeed appears to be reflected by an intense desire to become a professional player coupled with the strong belief that the individual can achieve this goal.

Perceived social status. The potential to gain respect within their community and to make their parents feel proud appeared to be perceived by players as important sources of social status that provided a motivational influence. For example, players perceived that soccer success could be an avenue towards gaining respect from friends, peers, and adults in the community. Many players reported that they already had experienced some of this respect for their achievements to date. P8 reported that: "There's a certain respect, a certain awe that you get sometimes, it's astonishing. From friends, or colleagues when I come back home, they will be asking questions, saying, 'I wish I had the chance to do that.'" Earning respect seemed to drive players to achieve more. The lure of being famous

(and the respect that fame appears to bring) was also an enticing motivational factor for some players, as P16 explained: "The chance to be famous is good for me, it motivates me to make something of myself." P4 said one of the reasons he was involved in soccer was because "it will bring you fame, so people know who you are, and you're acknowledged." Furthermore, playing for Canada may foster a sense of patriotic pride that operates on both individual and family levels: "When you are an international player it's pride for your country. To know that you parents are proud of you, to know your parents can talk about you." (P8). P19 said feelings of pride motivated him: "[When] I think about my family, like how proud they would be if I score a goal, I think about them a lot." For some players, perceived social status goals were related to earning respect outside of the home as an individual in their own right, whereas others were motivated by opportunities to develop a sense of personal and family pride.

Emulate role models. The success of other Canadian soccer players in Europe served a motivational function for the players in this study as they saw colleagues they could identify with who were making progress at the top level. In particular, the success of one role model, Owen Hargreaves (a player who grew up in Calgary) was significant to the Canadian players in this study because many had played with or against him at the provincial level. At the time of the initial interviews, Hargreaves had broken into the Bayern Munich first team squad at 18 years old, and went on to play a pivotal role in Bayern's 2001 European Champions League Cup victory (the most prestigious championship in European professional club soccer), and represented England's senior men's team in a World Cup qualifying game (by virtue of parental birth qualification). P9 saw Hargreaves as a role model, saying "Well, he was my best friend, he played on my team for four years, and I look what he's achieved." P1 stated that:

> I saw Owen Hargreaves have the opportunity to go over [to Europe]. He's been an inspiration. He was the one who kind of said to me 'this time you can do it too.' And after him that's when I said 'OK, I can do it.' So in that sense, he got me started to want to keep going. As far as somebody who is already at the top level, I just watch him.

Similarly, P4 said:

> I thought, 'He's [Hargreaves] a good player, and maybe I'm not that bad, so maybe I'll get my chance too.' He was the one everybody looked up to. It was almost the kind of thing where if he had no chance then the rest of us don't.

The second type of role models used by Canadian players were relatives who had experienced soccer success. Both P19 and P14 were influenced by their fathers who played soccer competitively. P14 was also strongly influenced by his uncle who played professionally in the USA. P15 wanted to emulate other family members who had experienced soccer success, "I've got an elder cousin now who is playing in New Jersey on a scholarship and I talk to him a lot. He gets to travel a lot for free, not just in this country, but all around the world, and he's only 18."

Finally, television images were important to Canadian athletes because they provided an opportunity to see top level professional soccer from other countries. Growing up, participants woke up early on Saturday mornings to watch live soccer games from Europe once a week on The Sports Network's (TSN) cable television "Soccer Saturday" show. These images seem to have had a profound effect on a number of players: "I just see it out there, I see players on the TV. I've had that ever since I was young, watching soccer on TV" (P7); and, "I watched games on TV, and it would always be in my mind, so I'd say I dreamed of being a pro from the beginning because of those images" (P2). From these TV images, players were able to embrace role models playing in European leagues. Some examples of professional role models who were influential for Canadian players included: Liverpool's Michael Owen, Canadian international Paul Peschisolido of Fulham (P4); Gianluca Buffon of Juventus (P8); and, Peter Schmeichel, formerly of Manchester United (P13). P15 explained how he had a videotape of the career of Argentine international Diego Maradona, one of the best players in the world during the 1990s:

> There was a story about Maradona where they said he knew where he was going to pass it three passes before he got the ball. He was just one step ahead. So I learned to keep my head up and always be looking around, and know where people are.

TV role models appeared to be associated with a paternal interest in the game. Often this interest was related to ethnicity. For example, participants with an Italian father remembered images of Italy's Serie A league, whereas children of British descent watched English and Scottish league games. No participants mentioned any of the current Canadian international players as role models, or said that they watched the men's national team regularly. Ironically, Canadian players who grew up watching European teams on TV had very few images or memories of their own country competing at the international level.

Money. Television images of soccer offered a glimpse of countries where soccer is the main sport and where soccer players are held in heroic revere. For example, Owen Hargreaves (the young player who grew up in Calgary) reportedly earns $900 000 per annum with his club Bayern Munich (Fieldwork diary entry from TV and newspaper reports). P2 expressed his unhappiness with the salaries available at professional Canadian clubs: "You know, I see guys in Montreal [playing for the Impact] who, they are like 23 now, and they have been playing with them since the age of 19 or 20, and what's the point? They don't pay good enough." P4 was forthright about the lure of financial rewards (overseas): "Just seeing what it [soccer] could bring me. I know a lot of people aren't going to say it matters, but it could bring in the money." P8 thought having a soccer career could provide a fast-track into the world of high finance: "I could have studied and went down south [USA] to get a university degree, but that would have been five or six years, and hopefully if I take this route [soccer], it will be a bit quicker until I am making money." Earning money may be perceived as another means to earning respect or achieving social status, but, some players reported that money was not a primary motivational factor, but rather a peripheral benefit. P13 suggested:

> The main thing is that you are happy and you want to play soccer. That's the number one thing. Making money and being very rich, it's sort of a bonus, it's just an addition. If you are happy to play the sport, that's the number one thing.

However, P3 countered, "Obviously if someone said they are not playing for the money, they'd probably be lying." Ultimately, money acted as a motive for some players who

were pursuing a professional soccer career, but its relative importance seemed to vary across individuals.

Career Planning Goals

From the results of this study it became clear that elite soccer players plan their career development by anticipating the progress they are required to make, and positioning themselves in the most advantageous settings. Career planning goals can be described as the adopted strategies and decisions made by adolescent players (and their families) that direct their commitment to becoming a professional. These goals represent what adolescent soccer players become committed to during the pursuit of their careers'. Players reported using several strategies to enhance their career prospects. The most important career goals were to be an international or professional soccer player. The achievement of these career goals was planned by maximizing exposure to high performance competitive environments, which for most players typically involved competing in older age categories, and/or leaving Canada.

International to professional goals. Canadian players placed their international ambitions before professional club ambitions, because playing for Canada was viewed as a vehicle toward securing a professional career. In fact, there was a hierarchy of career goals: (a) becoming a Canadian international player; (b) becoming a professional player in North America; and, (c) becoming a professional player in Europe. The first two goals were subservient to the ultimate (perceived) objective, which was to play professional soccer in a major European league. Representing Canada was a short-term goal and a vehicle toward achieving professional ambitions. P7 described that he was "trying to make this under-20 national team. I want to play for Canada, that's been a goal for … I don't know how many years, since I was 15. That's my biggest goal right now, my most immediate goal."

The next potential step toward becoming a professional in Europe would appear to be gaining experience with the limited number of Canadian professional teams. However, Canadian teams were perceived as *either* a stepping stone for the earliest part of an adolescent player's career, *or* as a safety net if he did not experience success in Europe. For example, P13 stated, "I would begin playing in the A-league and see where

that would lead. I don't know if I have the ability to play in Europe, but I think I could play in the MLS." Playing in North America was generally a short-term goal which, if successful, could lead to the ultimate objective of becoming a professional player overseas. Most players looked towards the well-developed, well-financed European leagues. As P11 explained, "I'd like to try to go across to England, I thought of England ever since I was a kid, and that's where most people want to go." Although P11 felt that most people wanted to go to England, it appeared that most players wanted to play in Europe, preferably in a country that did not present a language barrier. For example, participants from Italian communities of Montreal or Toronto looked toward Italy's Serie A, while French-speaking players considered the French First Division. Ethnic connections to certain European countries were certainly pull factors, but most participants simply wanted to play in a country where soccer was viewed as the number one sport in the society. As P19 described, "I want to go overseas to Europe, or even South America. The atmosphere is better, they love soccer more in Europe and South America, they have more pride in the game." Indeed, one English-speaking African-born participant was already playing in a European country where he did not speak the language, showing how the desire to play professionally may overcome language barriers or cultural ties. Given these aspirations, a number of strategic choices were made to pursue soccer careers.

Play up. One strategy players used to maximize their exposure *within* Canada was to play in older age groups during early adolescence (i.e., aged 12-15 years). P7 recalled that, "When I was younger, I was always brought up to play with the older kids." P17 recognized the benefits of seeking older competitors:

> I always played up in age groups to get better competition… It's pretty challenging right now because the players are older than me, and they are the best for their age. It's good for me because most of them are bigger than me.

P1 described how he played up throughout his childhood and that this carried through to middle adolescence for him:

> I guess the thing that helped me out the most was that I never played in my age level, I was always moving up. I played for the junior high team when I was in elementary school. As soon as I turned 16 I said I have to go play with men, I can't keep playing with you guys.

By playing in older age groups young players were able to compete against faster, stronger, more experienced players, stimulating their early development as a player. All of the Canadian coaches in this study encouraged young players to compete in older age groups as soon as they were capable. In this way, 'playing up' was perceived as the main way of overcoming the lack of competition available to adolescent players in Canada at their respective age groups.

Gain exposure. The theme underlying gaining exposure relates to the purposeful selection of training and playing environments that the players believed would maximize their progress toward their career ambitions. There was a widespread assumption among participants that players are unable to stay in Canada to achieve their soccer ambitions as they entered the middle adolescent period. P8 was clear on this issue: "There's no way I could achieve my ambitions in Canada" and P7 agreed: "I definitely would *want* to stay in Canada, but I'd have to say no, I wouldn't be able to stay to achieve my ambitions." A player with experience playing overseas for two years was in no doubt that leaving Canada was an important step for him, "People ask, "why did you go to Germany?" because they always hear about the bad times, and I always tell people, no matter what you hear, or what I have said, it was a good learning experience" (P1). Given that the ultimate aim of most players was to play professionally in a major world league, and that Canada has been unable to sustain a professional league, it was not surprising that players thought they would have to leave the country at some point in their careers to gain exposure to the most suitable environments for their development.

Coupled with leaving Canada, the selection of an appropriate team overseas (which best suited the players' competitive demands) was also an important decision to be made. P4, referring to the professional team he plays for in England, said, "we have youth players coming up to the reserves and first team every week. We usually field a young side with four or five youth players on it." P4 selected a 'smaller' club (i.e., with

less financial resources) because he saw the chance to play with the reserve team[4], and even the first team from time to time, thus maximizing the exposure he received. P8 described a similar strategy when choosing a professional club in England:

> For me at the moment, its finding the right club, with a nice balance between a good club with coaching stability, good training grounds, [and] good accommodation. It would be one of those clubs that have the academy facilities, but not a huge club. For me, in my position, not a Manchester, but maybe an Ipswich Town[5], or a smaller club where there is a good chance for me to play all the time, because that's the main point.

Canadian players also perceived that playing for the national team provided them with more exposure to competitive environments. P13 realized that "To play for the Canadian national team is a privilege, but you get recognized too." P14 thought his agent would help him get a place with a European professional team, but he also realized the importance of playing with the national team for the exposure it provided: "I think T------ (name of agent) will help me go over, but playing with the national team will help me get over there too." Similarly, P20 thought the exposure he gained through playing against international and professional opponents with team Canada was important: "And if I stay on the national team I can be seen, but if I was not on the national team it will be a lot harder for me."

## Resilience

This cluster of psychosocial competencies is characterized by the manner in which adolescent players learn to deal with adversity and overcome potential obstacles. Specifically, resilience is "the ability to bounce back after adversity, trauma, or rejection" (Piirto, 1999, p. 31). Players learned to be resilient to cope with competitive and contextual adversity present in the fickle world of professional sport, where failure is rarely tolerated and mistakes often punished by criticism (see Figure 3). An excellent

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[4] In English football the "reserve team" is the feeder team for the "first team" which plays in the high profile league. Thus, playing on the reserve team is a level below the first team, but a necessary part of the career progression of a young soccer player.

[5] Although the player is making reference to Ipswich Town Football Club as a "small team" it should be recognized that this club plays in the English Premier League – the top professional league in the country – and is much "bigger" than any Canadian soccer team.

example of the overall concept of resilience was provided by P8, who described the resilient competencies that enabled him to continue with his soccer career when he was not selected for his under-16 provincial team. He recalled his response to this potentially crushing blow to the career of a young Canadian soccer player:

> I thought I did well in the provincial try-outs, but I got cut in the last cut. It dropped me at that moment in time, but when I thought about it, I thought, 'well I didn't make it this year, I'll work harder' so I just worked my balls off the whole year, and I made it the next year. I had to realize I wasn't good enough and I just had to keep on going. It just kind of pushed me more I guess.

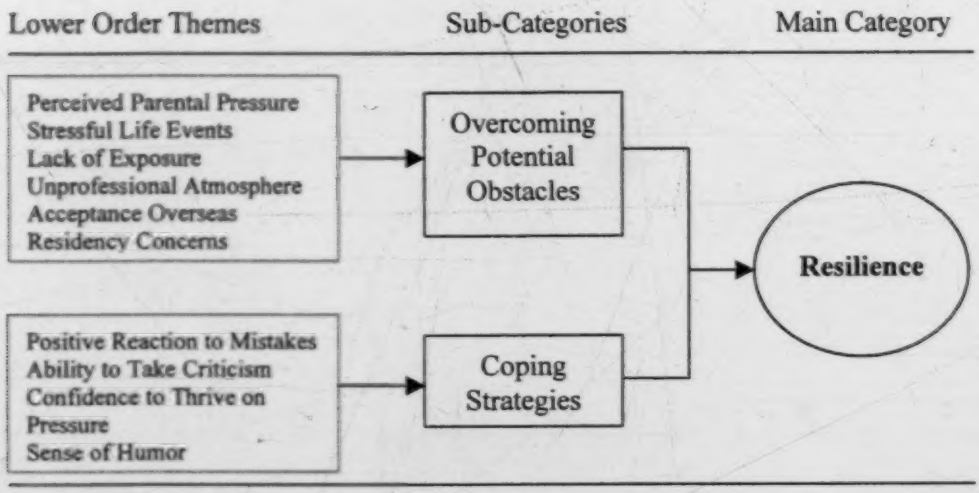


Figure 3. Conditions describing resilience (Canadian data).

Overcoming Potential Obstacles

Players were able to demonstrate resilience through in their abilities to overcome potential obstacles. Canadian players faced a range of potential obstacles that required resilient responses. Two potential obstacles were related to family circumstances (parental pressure and traumatic experience), whereas the other factors were related to the structure of soccer in Canada and abroad.

Perceived parental pressure. Although parents were a source of social support for players, there was also the potential for parental involvement to be perceived as an obstacle that players must negotiate. For example, P13's father tried to push his son to train when he was injured: "Sometimes I would like him to back off. Sometimes my brother would have to start arguing with him to lay off me, and then he would get mad at my brother." P13 felt that his father was pressurizing because "parents, they want to live in us, because they didn't get the chance to do what we get to do. They feel that we can go on further [so] they want to push and push." P2 had experienced pressure from his father, "I think at some stages it has been a bit too much, not in the sense that I had to play, but when I was young, he'd come to watch, and if I didn't play well, he'd yell at me." It appeared as though subtle parental actions that were intended to be supportive could be perceived as pressurizing. For example, P6 thought:

> They're [parents] not putting any pressure on me, but really it is pressure in the end, because I know that they want me to do well, but I know that if I come home cut it will be disappointing to them. Even if they are saying, 'we're fully behind you,' what does that mean? It means they want me to do well, they're cheering for me, but it's going to be pressure because they don't want you to fail.

Likewise, P9 perceived his mother's 'support' negatively:

> My mom probably is involved the most, but it's almost too much sometimes. She lives in [location A], and my Dad and step-mom live in [location B] with me, and sometimes on the phone, all that she wants to talk about is soccer. She tells me news from the Canadian Soccer website that I've already seen, it's just almost repetitive, and it's just… that's all she wants to talk about and it's too much.

Another example (recorded in the fieldwork diary) revealed another dimension of parental pressure that a young player might face. During a national team camp, I noticed an adult (who I presumed was a parent) arrive at the field and engage the head coach in what appeared to be a very heated debate. After 30 minutes the 'parent' left. Later, the head coach informed me that the person was actually the president of a big youth soccer

club in Montreal. His under-17 team had an important game that afternoon, and the club president had come to collect his star player. Of course, the national team coach was not going to release the player. However, the club had given the boy's father a job to entice his son to joining the team, and now the club president threatened to fire the father if the boy did not play with his club that afternoon. The player chose to stay at the camp. I watched the player closely in the afternoon session to see if he had the resilience to handle this complex situation and still perform at a high level: he did.

Stressful life events. Events such as a death in the family or divorce of parents were personal traumas that some players navigated during the course of their early athletic development. It appears that successfully coping with such events actually contributed to the development of players' psychological and emotional skills. Not all players reported traumatic experiences, but such experiences had a significant impact on the lives of those people who were affected. For example, both P9 and P15 reported that their parents were divorced. P9 said coping with this experience had taught him to "take any setbacks in life in your stride, evaluate what happened, and go from there." P15 made the following comment:

> [The divorce] affected my soccer [at first], and I just said that I was going to put my effort into soccer, and progress and progress, and it didn't bother me after a while, because I had my soccer. It [soccer] was like another relation to me, just to have it in the back of my head that I had the sport.

P7 experienced the death of a close family member while he was away from home: "I was dealing with things on my own. I think that's what made me strong, because sometimes you have nobody to turn to. I think it's those experiences that made me stronger." This quote epitomizes the quality of resilience; the ability to bounce back after a setback.

Lack of exposure. Canadian players lacked exposure to the international soccer community if they remained in Canada due to the absence of a professional league structure. This was a contextual factor that created adversity to be overcome. For example, P4 said:

> If I wanted to make it, from where I've played now [professionally in Europe], if I had still been here, I wouldn't be near where I am. I'd still be playing provincial soccer, I'd be playing club soccer, u17 in [location in Ontario], and I don't think I'd be able to achieve my goals.

The stark contrast of playing in an under-17 league in Ontario in front of a handful of parent-spectators, versus playing in front of 15 000 people every week in the English first division perfectly exemplifies the lack of exposure Canadian players face. P4, and other Canadian players, overcame this adversity by moving to a location where they could experience the exposure they required.

Unprofessional atmosphere. Coupled with the lack of exposure was the difficulty of coping with an unprofessional attitude that pervades the Canadian soccer system. P2 felt the absence of a professional approach to training in Canada constrained his development as a player. Players with European experience realized the lack of professionalism in Canadian soccer, whereas those players still living in Canada did not perceive their training environment negatively. P1 described some of the differences between Canada and Germany:

> When I was in Germany, you're playing twice a day. I think we have good enough coaches [in Canada] where they would be able to develop players into really good players. That's probably one of the biggest problems, the different lifestyles we have here compared to the Europeans. They do it every day, constantly, and that type of things, it's your development, it's like going to school where your development keeps going and going and going. So, that's probably the biggest obstacle that we have here.

P9 agreed, "It's almost like you get a different attitude when you come here [to a national team camp]. It's a professional environment, and you don't get that when you are at home."

Another aspect of the unprofessional atmosphere surrounding soccer in Canada related to the perception that the sport was under funded, which was attributed to political decisions at various levels of administration and government. At one camp visited during fieldwork, players were very disappointed with the standard of the training fields at the

national training center in Toronto. It transpired that the poor quality fields were owned by the city of Toronto, and maintained at the same level as local park fields. P8 explained his personal disgust with the situation, "that's supposed to be a national field, and it's a total wreck. The CSA are not looking at the simple things, they are trying to reach the lofty goals without setting the base." Moving away from Canada was the approach to dealing with many of these contextual factors.

Acceptance overseas. This category relates to the experiences of Canadian players who compete overseas with respect to becoming accepted by the local players at the various clubs. Given that most players are required to move to Europe to pursue their careers, resilience was required to deal with this move. Typically, players faced a short period of suspicion from local players when they arrived at a new club, as P20 experienced: "They weren't friendly in Italy for the first probably two weeks, but when you get to know them they were pretty nice." P3 faced a more difficult period of acceptance:

> Well, the first time I went over [to Europe] I was only 14, and they used to do things to me. Like in the shower they pee on me, and all types of stuff like that. I went to Belgium, and it was bad there because I didn't speak the language, and I knew they were all taking the piss and all that, but you just get through it. England they accepted me pretty good.

Another participant was the subject of a newspaper article about the racist stereotyping he experienced in Europe. Adolescent soccer players from Canada must be prepared to deal with negative interpersonal interactions if they go to Europe to pursue their career because some local European players perceive the Canadian as an intruder coming to steal their job. Successful players are able to manage such potential obstacles and focus on developing their ability as a soccer player.

Residency concerns. Most players looked towards Europe to further their professional ambitions. Visa regulations in Europe are complicated if an individual does not have an immediate family member who was born in the European Union (EU). Those without European ancestry faced a minefield of bureaucracy and administration that

made it almost impossible to gain a working visa. For example, in England, non-EU players must satisfy two criteria of the Overseas Labor Service:

(1) A player must have played for his country in at least 75% of its competitive matches that he was available for selection during the two years preceding the date of the application.

(2) The FIFA (Federation International de Football Association) rankings of the player's country must be at or above the 70th place in the official rankings list when averaged over the two years preceding the date of the application (Bent, McIroy, Mousley, & Walsh, 2001, p. 109).

At the start of 2001 the Canadian men's soccer team had a FIFA world ranking of 67, but unfortunately dropped to 92nd by December 31st, 2001 due to a run of poor results. This low world ranking creates a political obstruction in the career development of adolescent players. It is virtually impossible for adolescent players to gain a working visa in the UK unless they have EU citizenship rights (and the players in the sample who played in Europe held EU citizenship by virtue of parental birth qualifications).

Coping Strategies

In addition to displaying resilient behaviors in order to overcome potential obstacles, players also possessed a range of more situation-specific coping strategies that enabled them to manage social and psychological stressors associated with the competitive soccer environment. Coping consists of a person's conscious attempts to manage the demands or intensity of events perceived as stressful (Lazarus, 1999). In elite soccer environments, mistakes during competition are inevitable and players are under intense scrutiny. Players learned to deal with competitive stressors by utilizing the following strategies: (a) react positively to mistakes, (b) react positively to criticism, (c) have confidence to thrive on pressure, and, (d) employ a sense of humor.

Positive reaction to mistakes. Although mistakes were tolerated, coaches did not tolerate negative reactions to mistakes, particularly if the athlete engaged in maladaptive coping behaviors such as avoiding certain situations in play. For example, if a goalkeeper

dropped a cross that resulted in a goal for the opposing team,[6] the developmental-level coach might tolerate the error, but would not tolerate the goalkeeper staying on his line rather than coming out to try to catch the next cross (P8). Players understood the value of displaying a positive reaction to their mistakes. P12 explained how he reacted to a mistake:

> When I make a mistake, I try not to get mad at myself, just to keep trying, because sometimes people will make mistakes. It's hard when it happens, but you have to put it right behind you. [The national team coach] is looking for you not to put your head down after you make a mistake, just lift up your head and try again.

P7 described the resilience required to react positively under the stress of elite competition:

> There are going to be times in a game where you might make a bad pass, or not dribble a person, not beat a player, but you need to just know always in your mind you are going to get it done right the next time. There's always going to be times when you don't do something right, or you are going to fall, but you have to pick yourself up.

A common theme mentioned by the players related to the principle of not 'hiding' on the field after a mistake. A national team captain explained:

> If a guy has the ball and you are hiding, that's when the coach will really blast you. If you are not hiding, and you go after the ball and your first touch is ugly, and then you go again the second time on your left foot, and it's ugly, he won't scream at you. He'll realize that you made your run and it happens (P15).

Players strongly believed that it was important to demonstrate their positive reaction to mistakes overtly, so that the coaches could observe their behavior. P2 explained how he tried not to hide on the field after a mistake: "You got to go back to the simplistic things. I think the most important thing is, you can have the shittiest game, as

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[6] A cross is a high ball delivered from the wing into the penalty area. Goalkeepers are expected to catch most high 'crosses' in order to dominate their penalty area.

long as you do the things defensively, then you've done the best you can under the circumstances."

Ability to take criticism. Despite the noted willingness to tolerate certain errors, at higher levels of competition coaches still tend to be very demanding of their players, setting challenging activities and expecting players to strive for perfection (P22). Elite soccer players learned to listen to criticism, select the pertinent information, and put that information into practice. P8 said he tried to "take everything I see and hear positively and just try to learn from it." P6 understood that criticism was a necessary part of the developmental process an athlete experiences: "When you get criticism, you take it the right way, and there's no question about it. I mean, he's [the national team coach] giving you criticism to make you better, you have to look at the bigger picture." Notably, the players referred to dealing with criticism from well-respected and qualified national team coaches in all of the examples. When it came to dealing with criticism from people outside of soccer, including the media, players were less inclined to use this information. As P1 said, referring to criticism from non-soccer people: "If I don't do that well, people might say 'you suck' or whatever, but that's your opinion and I don't care."

Confidence to thrive on pressure. Adolescent players face a wide range of potential stressors (e.g., attending an international team camp, international debut, etc.) and although the specific sources of stress may change over an athlete's career, intense pressure to perform remains at all levels. To succeed in such environments, players must not only be able to *cope* with pressure, but in some sense they must learn to thrive on their perceptions of pressure and use it to their advantage. For example, P4 expected to make a telling contribution to a game when the situation was most critical:

> If it's two-all [i.e., tied 2-2] in the cup final, and you are in the last minute, I expect to be the one to score the winning goal, or set up the winning goal, or get the penalty, or get brought down for the penalty. I want to be the one that creates it, and I expect to be it, because of what I have done, from [since I was] young, and being myself.

Several other players discussed how they used pressure situations to add another dimension to their performance. P8 said, "I like the pressure situations where the game is

on the line, and you are not supposed to win, and then I know it is my chance to step up and show everybody I am worth it when people might doubt me." Similarly, P14 described the importance of possessing confidence to thrive on the pressure situations he encountered, "Well, I think that if you don't have a lot of confidence in yourself, then you are not going to perform to the best of your abilities in pressure situations."

Sense of humor. Given the pressure, criticism, constant desire to improve, sacrifices, and all the other aspects that fill the life of an elite adolescent soccer player, maintaining a sense of humor and the ability to laugh at the most difficult situations was an important attribute. Many of the coaches seemed to encourage a sense of humor at the appropriate times in their training sessions and camps. For example, coaches at the under-17 camp frequently displayed humor with the players (for example during mealtimes, before and after practice sessions). It was serious during on-field practice times, and players seemed to understand when to be serious, and when they could have fun.

Similarly, coaches demonstrated their understanding of appropriate timing of humor and their on-going enjoyment of soccer by playing 3 v 3 after every morning practice while the players showered for lunch (they were happy to have me join in to even up the teams!). I noticed that many players stayed to watch the coaches play so they could make some good natured jokes about their coaches' performance levels (usually repeating some of the head coaches' favorite sayings). It appears that the players were able to differentiate between the 'business hours' and the 'social hours' during their work day, and recognized the unwritten social etiquette of when it was appropriate to engage in the use of humor, particularly when it was at the head coaches' expense.

Within the elite soccer context, P6 thought that a sense of humor helped him cope with the pressures he faced: "It's easier for me because I have that little less serious approach, I can have a laugh before the game." P4 thought sometimes his sense of humor could cause problems, but only it if was inappropriately expressed: "some people say having fun is like immaturity, because I go out and I have a laugh on the field… Over there [England] I'd try to do that, but it wasn't working, and they were like, 'C'mon, grow up, play a man's game.'" Despite this apparent contradiction between systems, P4 maintained a sense of humor which helped him deal with the multiple demands he faced.

## Social Support

The category of social support refers to athletes' perceptions of the availability of social support and their ability to utilize these sources of support in the pursuit of a soccer career. Social support appears to operate in conjunction with personal resilience characteristics to enable players to pursue a soccer career. Players perceived the availability of three main sources of social support that helped them cope with the obstacles they faced; emotional support, informational support, and tangible support. Predictably, coaches provided informational support, but parents also helped if they had soccer experience. Parents were also an important source of emotional and tangible support. Friends were also perceived as a source of social support (Figure 4).

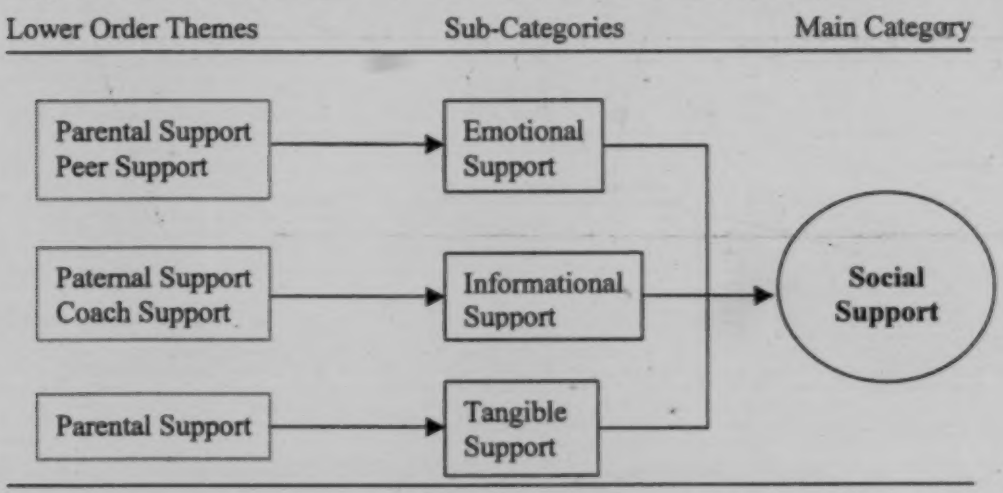


Figure 4. Conditions describing social support (Canadian data).

### Emotional Support

Emotional support is defined as the ability to "turn to others for comfort and security during times of stress, leading the person to feel that he or she is cared for by others" (Cutrona & Russell, 1990, p. 332). Emotional support was provided by parents and friends.

Parental support. Although pressure from parents may be a source of adversity to overcome (as described previously), parental support can also be highly beneficial in that it enabled many players to deal with some of the sacrifices they had made. Parents played

a key role in the career development of many adolescent players, and were frequently described as providing unconditional positive regard. P15 said:

> My parents will never say 'you have to do this, you better make that team.' They say that I better get my good grades, but in soccer they never tell me, they say, 'if you want to stop now, stop now, it's up to you. But we are there to support you should you decide to carry on.' And as long as I respect them, and take soccer seriously, and respect those things then it's OK.

I witnessed expressions of parental support during the weekend sessions of one national team camp when a number of parents came out to watch training sessions (from a 'safe' distance). Upon inquiring, it transpired that several were staying overnight; they had driven for several hours, some from another province, in order to show support for their sons.

P19 said he was supported by "Practically my whole family. They are always calling me, asking me when my next trip is, wishing me luck." P3 found that emotional support from his parents was important when he moved to England: "Yeah, it made things a lot easier, and when you are not feeling as good as you should, you can always call your parents. They're always there for you and support you, even if it's on the phone, so they're really good." Similarly, P6 felt his family were always there for him, "I can go to them and talk if I'm getting tired of training, and they'll give you a boost. They kind of just make you think, and you realize what you are doing it for, and it helps." These examples show some ways by which parental support helped players cope with the sacrifices they made and the obstacles they faced as they pursued their careers.

Peer support. Generally players had friends who were not involved in elite soccer to spend time with in order to escape from the tensions of elite competition. The following extracts describe how peer support enabled players to maintain a healthy balance in their lives. P2 explained:

> All the people I'm friends with and hang out with don't play soccer, and most of them, except a couple, don't play sports at all. I think it's a good balance where you can go away from the game, and you have friends

away from the game, so you don't always talk about soccer. So in that sense, I think it's great.

P1 thought his friends were also supportive, "I try to leave soccer behind. Most of my friends are from basketball, and then I have friends that I'm just really good friends with, and I can talk to them and we won't talk about soccer in a month." P3 also thought his friends provided a break from the pressures of soccer, "Oh, when I come home with my friends, we just go to the park and play basketball. I don't even want to see a soccer ball, I'm so sick of it from what I've done."

Informational Support

Informational support provides "the individual with advice or guidance concerning possible solutions to a problem" (Cutrona & Russell, 1990, p. 322). Coaches and fathers were the main sources of informational support for Canadian participants in this study.

Paternal support. In terms of informational support, it became clear that it was usually the father who played the most important role with respect to providing his son with soccer advice. This advice was often based on the father's own previous soccer experiences. P18's father assisted him: "My Dad used to talk to me about soccer. He played defense, and he used to tell me stuff about playing the position." The same was true for P4: "When I was young, my Dad just told me to think of what I was doing, read the game, even if you don't have the ball." P2's father emphasized the importance of improving his weaknesses, which was important because "at the younger ages, I didn't look at those things, maybe I didn't want to. But my Dad always told me, 'if you're good at that, then fine, but you've got to work on what you're not good at.'" Typically fathers were able to provide informational support in the form of technical or tactical advice, and although this seemed very prevalent when players were younger, for some it continued into adolescence: "My father. He comes to all the games, he enjoys watching, he likes to watch every play. He helps me also, if I have a bad game, he'll tell me, he'll correct me" (P20).

Coach support. Not surprisingly, coaches supplied players with important information that assisted with their soccer development. Often coaches from players'

home provinces would continue to provide informational support. P7 remembered that some of his former coaches had been inspirational to him. P1 recalled the time when his provincial coaches noticed his talent and started to pay more attention to him:

> I got lucky, I got to the point where coaches started to notice me, and they wanted to do that little bit extra to help me out. [Name of coach] would always do that, and I used to wonder why this guy was always being hard on me all the time, and then after a while I figured it out, that he was doing this because he wants me to learn the mentality of what's it's like to face pressure.

P12 thought many of his coaches provided important advice:

> The coaches here with the national team and the coaches back in Ontario. If I make a mistake in a game, they don't take me out of the game, they let me stay in there to correct my mistake. They give me advice, and tell me to just keep playing until the end.

Certain national team coaches were also perceived as sources of informational support. In particular, one under-17 team assistant coach had delivered a session on the use of visualization skills to deal with the demands of international soccer. He provided this information because the coaching staff thought many of the players struggled to cope with the competitive demands of playing a recent international tournament in France.

Tangible Support

Tangible support is "concrete instrumental assistance, in which a person in a stressful situation is given the necessary resources (e.g., financial assistance, physical help with tasks) to cope with the stressful event" (Cutrona and Russell, 1990, p. 322). Both parents provided tangible support to players in this study.

Parental support. Parents provided tangible support primarily in the form of travel assistance and financial backing. P3's parents paid for him to go to soccer schools when he was younger. P5 described how his parents worked as a team to help him: "my Mum and my Dad are my only family that live in Canada, so they drive me everywhere, pay for me, pay for my plane tickets if I go back to England or somewhere else [to play soccer]. They support me a lot." Transportation to and from games was important support for a

number of players (e.g., P9, P17). Financial support was also important. For example, P15 was unable to earn money because "sometimes we train on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, so I can't work, so my parents motivate me to stay on the team, stay healthy, travel, train as hard as you can, and they look after the money." Usually both parents shared the responsibilities for providing tangible support.

Summary of Canadian Data

The four main psychosocial competencies are presented below (Figure 5) as a summary of the Canadian data. Each of these competencies is located within the context of the Canadian talent development environment.

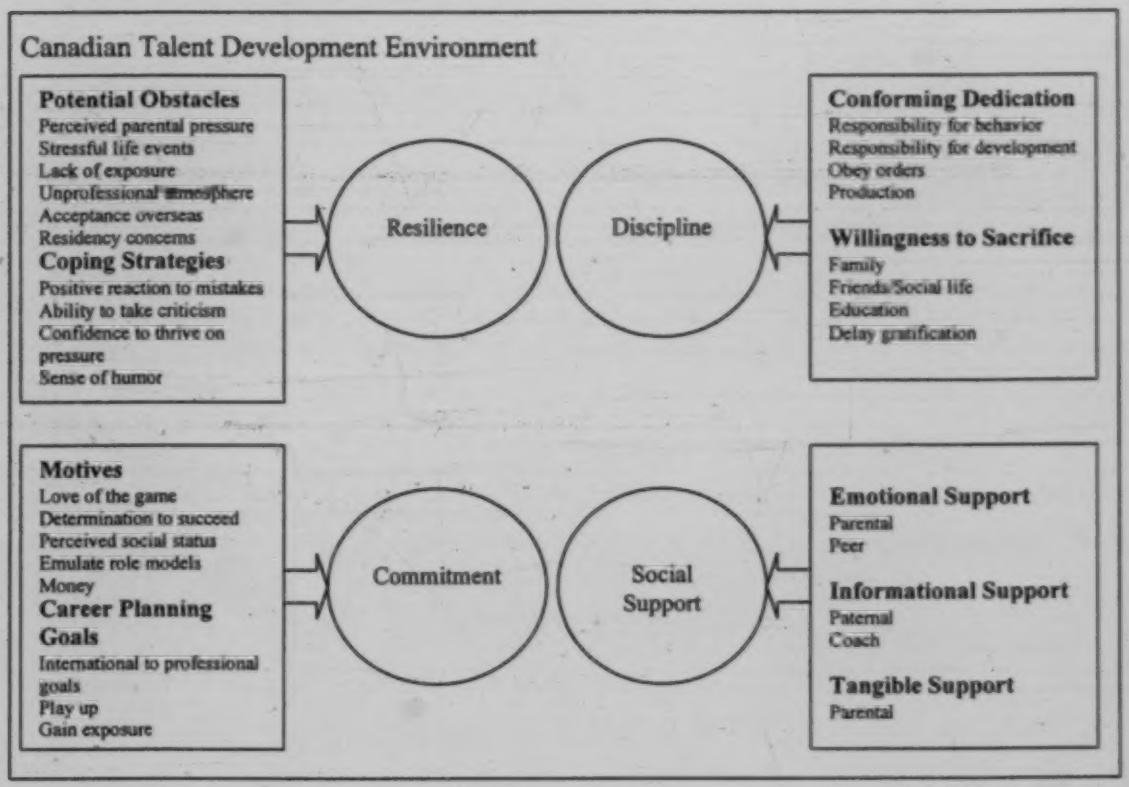


Figure 5. Summary of Canadian data.

## The Talent Development Environment in England

Soccer is the premier sport in British society, with 92 professional clubs in the English league structure. Soccer occupies a central role in the lives of young English males (Skeleton, 2000). The English introduced the modern game of soccer, formalizing the rules in the 1800s. Fittingly, the English were traditionally innovators in soccer, but a disappointing performance in the 1950 World Cup in Brazil, and a 6-3 defeat by Hungary at Wembley in 1953 - the first loss on home soil - led to increased youth scouting programs by professional teams (Parker, 1996). In 1966 England defeated Germany 4-2 to win its first and only World Cup. During the 1960s the enrolment of young players with professional clubs in England escalated, but apart from the highlight of the World Cup victory, professional soccer in England was in a decline, languishing amidst the consequences of economic constraint (Parker, 1996). In the 1960/1961 season, the English Football Association (EFA) introduced a football apprenticeship scheme to train young players. However, since 1966, despite the success of professional English teams in European club competitions, the English national team has failed to win a major tournament. Popular opinion blamed the unproductive talent development environment for the lack of international success.

In the 1970s the British government introduced the Youth Training Scheme (YTS). Under the conditions of the YTS, the government provided subsidies to business throughout the UK who employed and trained young people. The introduction of the YTS scheme to football helped clubs overcome some of the financial barriers that constrained youth development in the 1960s. The YTS program (serving youth aged 15-18 years) was founded on the principles of working class trade apprenticeships, and the YTS schemes brought a general coherence and prescriptive standardized feel to trainee provision in a variety of vocational domains (Parker, 1996).

During the 1980s, seeking to develop a more progressive youth training policy, the EFA developed a national school of excellence at Lilleshall National Sports Centre in Shropshire, England, along with 147 regional Centres of Excellence throughout England to help with the development of talented adolescent soccer players. Although the regional Centres of Excellence were under the jurisdiction of the EFA, the majority were attached

to professional clubs. Some professional clubs had independent youth development systems, but talent development was conducted in a piecemeal fashion, lacking structure and an overall framework (Fisher & Dean, 1998). The EFA was primarily responsible for talent development through national team programs and the national school of excellence. However, Fynn and Guest (1989) speculated that disagreements over the control of youth development during the late 1980s impaired the development of young players in England. By the mid 1990s, in the face of intense media pressure after England failed to qualify for the 1994 World Cup Finals in the USA, the EFA recognized that their current system was inadequate for the purpose of serving the needs of developing young players. The English talent development system was considerably different in comparison to successful systems in mainland Europe (Fisher & Dean, 1998). As a result of these concerns, the English system has recently been re-modeled based on successful youth development programs at top European clubs (e.g., Auxerre, France; Ajax, The Netherlands).

The redevelopment of the talent development system is based on the EFA's *'Charter for Excellence'* (EFA, 1998), which was introduced to provide a greater role to the professional clubs in the development of young players (Fisher & Dean, 1998). Under the Charter for Excellence, professional clubs are entitled to put forward their youth development systems as candidates for Football Academy status. This prestigious moniker represents the standard of excellence for youth development in English football. A number of criteria must be satisfied in order for a club to qualify as a Football Academy as outlined by the Charter. Academies offer three-year scholarships for players aged 16-19 years, with feeder systems providing coaching for players aged eight years and older. Two teams may be operated (under 17 and under 19), and 'scholars' (as the players are called) must receive a minimum of 12 hours football instruction per week. In the past, the English system was criticized due to an over-emphasis on games at the expense of practice, particularly in reference to the incidence of serious injuries among young players (Fisher, 1996). Under the Charter, players are restricted to a maximum of 30 competitive games per season, and if this rule is violated the offending club will have their Academy license revoked (EFA, 1998).

Although soccer is a global sport, there are national trends and characteristics reflecting cultural differences in approaches to the game (Fisher & Dean, 1998). Breitner (1994) reflected on such cultural differences, and suggested international level soccer "is just as much a clash of cultural approaches, which dictate the way teams play, as it is a battle of tactics" (p. 258). The English game can be characterized by a forthright and direct style of play, based on qualities of hard work, a fighting spirit, strength, and speed. 'Continental' players from mainland continental European countries (e.g., Italy, Spain, and France) embody characteristics such as skill, flamboyance, flair, and creativity (Kuper, 1994).

## Discipline

Elite adolescent soccer players required high levels of self-control and conformity. Many professional clubs in England impose strict standards on behavior and discipline. For example, several clubs weighed their adolescent players on Monday mornings. The 'official' purpose of this weekly ritual was to monitor physical growth and development. The unofficial and more pertinent purpose (according to both players and coaches) was to assess if players had been 'abusing' their bodies with alcohol and excess consumption of food on the weekend. As a result of these institutional demands, players learned to display appropriate disciplined, dedicated behaviors, and demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice other elements of their lifestyles (Figure 6).

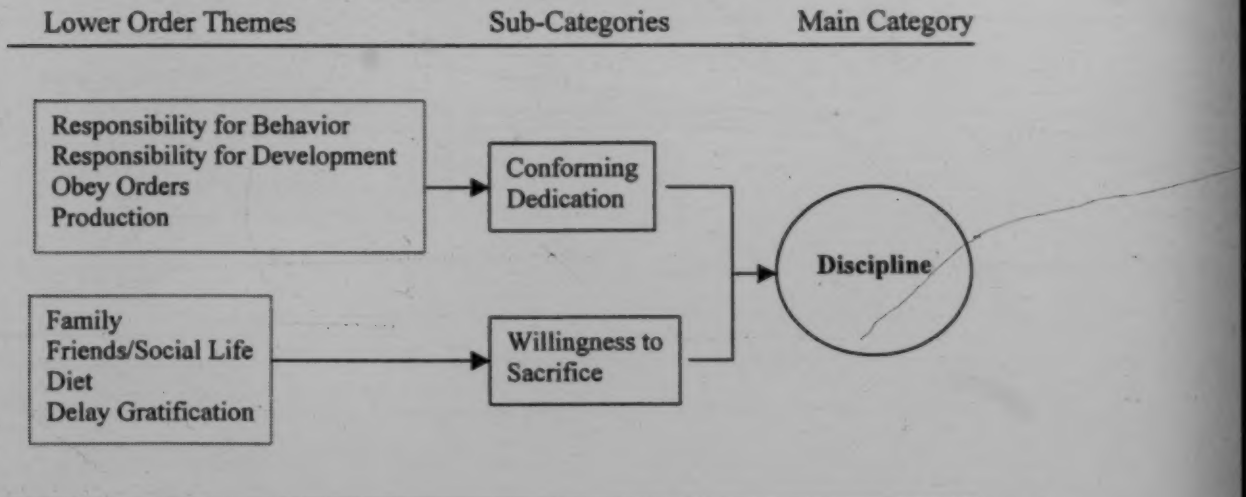


Figure 6. Conditions describing discipline (English data).

Conforming Dedication

The notion of conforming dedication (acquiring self-control and conformity) involved the development of individual responsibility for personal behavior and personal development, they ability to obey orders, and the ability to produce.

Responsibility for behavior. Professional soccer clubs emphasized that a certain standard of personal behavior was expected of their adolescent players. On the field, P33 described the responsibilities that he thought his club expected of him: "As a player, it's the way you conduct yourself before, during, and after the game. Being professional included making sure you have a proper warm-up, making sure you are prepared for the game." P35 explained how he tried to emulate the professional players he saw even though he was only 15 years-old: "I try to be as professional as the professionals. I try to be professional about everything that I do, [and] make sure I am doing it right." P36 described some behaviors that convey the notion of acting responsibly:

> It's everything. It's your attitude, your behavior on and off the field, your politeness, your dress. If you dress smartly, you look professional. You should say please and thank-you to the dinner lady, that kind of stuff. You can see that the older players have done that and you've got to do that too.

Responsibility for development. Participants were expected to take personal responsibility for their development as a soccer player. A coach said that the development of personal responsibility was an important element of becoming a successful professional soccer player:

> The coaches and myself are always giving this aura of 'you are responsible for your success. We are not the ones who will make you into a player, you will make yourself into a player, we are just the system.' Once they realize that they are responsible for their success or their failure, then you are halfway there (P37).

Players and coaches alike often described taking personal responsibility for development as having a 'good attitude.' P43 thought this may be one of the primary factors that distinguished between less and more successful players:

> I know players who are good players, but haven't got the attitude. If you've got good ability, you need to make sure your attitude's as good as your ability. Sometimes ability doesn't get you where you need to be, it's attitude that gets you there.

A coach (P32) said, "Certain players at this club at the moment have got masses of ability, but their character and attitude is holding them back." It was quite clear that an attitude that encompassed the notion of taking personal responsibility for development was perceived as an important part of becoming a professional soccer player. For example, in addition to official practice sessions (approximately 12 hours per week), players worked on their own to develop their strength and speed. P35 said, "it's physically hard to play at this level. I go to the park and put those sand weights on and kick the ball, and it made my legs a lot stronger." During the summer rest period, as P36 reported "working hard doing athletics to sharpen up my sprinting [was important]." Many players recognized the importance of consistent deliberate practice in order to fine tune their skills. P44 was characteristic of this theme when he said, "I think just constant practicing, doing things like passing, working on skills. If you keep working on them, then you are bound to get better at them." Engaging in extra practice reflected how players assumed personal responsibility for their own development, rather than expecting their coaches to do it for them.

Obey orders. Players understood that in order to be effective within the team setting and to produce disciplined performances they must learn to follow instructions. Following coaches' instructions was repeatedly emphasized as an important part of playing and training as a professional player. P30 said he learned to "listen to my coaches, I listen to what they tell me and don't do my own thing now, because they know best, so I listen to what they have to say." P35 thought he followed orders well, stating, "I think I do everything they say." Similarly, P40 proposed the following formula as a way to secure a professional contract: "Short term I have to play consistently, long term I've got to do everything that they tell me to do really. I've got to do what they like." Coaches expected their players to do as they were told, as P46 explained:

> As a football club we try not to put up with any sort of nonsense. Anybody that gets involved with anything on the pitch we drag them off. [The academy director] won't stand for anything. From 9-16 years old, you do as you are told, and if anybody steps out of line, we won't sign them, or won't keep them, because it's just hassle that you don't need.

Production. The most important expectation of an adult professional player is that he can produce the desired performance on the field of play during competition. Adolescent players in this sample understood the importance of producing in a game situation. They realized professional coaches expect players to be effective, and therefore valuable, on the field. P33 realized how important it was to do things correctly on the field and make a contribution to the team "to keep the coaches happy." P31 (coach) stressed the importance of a player's game performance in terms of assessing his progress: "Well, one thing you do look at them in game situations. The performance on Saturday is still crucial in all the eyes of all English coaches; it's the guide that everybody uses to make their assessments to choose the players."

Willingness to Sacrifice

Although perhaps not completely volitional, English players made sacrifices in order to become a successful adult player, perhaps as a result of the strength of the task-commitment motives identified. The main sacrifices reported pertained to family, friends/social life, and diet. Willingness to sacrifice achieved by delaying gratification for current sacrifices in order to receive benefits in the future was also an important factor.

Family. Players under 16 years old must live within 1.5 hours travel time of their chosen professional club under Charter guidelines. However, these rules do not apply to players past their 16th birthday. Although most players in England are never more than a few hours car drive from home, leaving the family home was still perceived as a significant sacrifice. P39, who moved from South Wales to the South-West coast of England (about three hours drive) said, "leaving home was the biggest sacrifice, leaving my family and coming over here." P40 expressed similar sentiments:

> Moving away from home was hard though. That's the obstacle for me actually. Moving away for the first time at 16 I said, 'Yeah, I don't mind'

> but the first day I came up here, and it hit me. All the lads knew each other already before they came, and I came here, on my own, and I knew no-one. It takes some time to settle in.

P33 thought that moving away from home meant "Losing my family, well not losing them, but not being able to be with them." A coach felt leaving home was one of the biggest sacrifices the adolescent players he brought to his club had to make in order to become a professional:

> A lot of lads have to leave home, and we put them in accommodation with new families. It's very difficult for them, because they've not been away from home before. Usually the local boys who are living on the doorstep with their Mum and Dad, it's easier for them (P46).

Friends/social life. The other major sacrifice players in England reported related to their social relationships with friends. The self-regulation of social life is part of the lifestyle of professional soccer players, but not being able to spend time with friends is a sacrifice of adolescence. P33 said, "Sometimes my mates will be going out on a Friday night, but I can't go because I've got football, and you can't really go out too late in the week when you've got training." P36 said he had to curtail "going out with friends. Basically, if I've got a game, I won't go out the night before." P38 was aware of certain alcohol-related problems that have troubled some big-name players in English soccer (e.g., George Best, Paul Gasgoigne, Tony Adams, Paul Merson), and advised, "never get involved with drink or anything like that, because it will get you into trouble. Just keep your mind on football."

Coaches also thought that social sacrifices were necessary. P31 said players "must sacrifice their time with their mates. That's the times that they are going to have to really sacrifice. And it's hard, but they have to cut themselves off." Another coach, P32, agreed, "Certainly when you are young, if you've got the chance [of becoming a professional] then you've got to sacrifice everything." Predictably, the coaches also emphasized the importance of a player regulating his lifestyle, as P31 said, "alcohol is a no-no, cigarettes are a no-no, all the things that we worry about are a temptation for all young teenagers, but they've got to be strong enough to stay away from it." Another coach (P46) also

stressed it was the players' responsibility to control their social lives: "I can only look after them and care about them when they are here, but I can't chaperone them everywhere. The vast majority do [look after themselves], but you are going to get the odd exception."

Diet. Since the interviews were conducted, some top Premiership players (e.g., Steven Gerrard of Liverpool) have been the subject of newspaper reports about the benefits of converting to a healthy diet as opposed to a previous diet of burgers and fries. However, adolescent players were already aware that a healthy diet was required by a professional athlete, and they had sacrificed eating junk food. P35 said:

> I've had to sacrifice my diet. They give you booklets about diet, and when I got it I thought, 'I'm only 15, I can't be handling all this.' There was all this information about your body type, and what your weight should be, and I weighed 13 stone, and I've lost half a stone.

The main issue for players who felt that diet was a sacrifice was the demand to keep their weight down. P43 noted, "That's another obstacle, and trying to keep the weight off... I can't eat bad food. I try to eat lots of fruit and veg and stuff." P27 was also concerned about his weight, wanting to become leaner and therefore (in his view), faster. It seems that the importance of diet was connected to the physical demands of English soccer, and the need for players to be strong and fast.

Delay gratification. The ability to delay gratification (realizing that the benefits of hard work now would be realized in the future) reflects a mature approach to career development. P33 said, "I don't really mind making the sacrifices. I've got my whole life to go out and stuff." Similarly, P43 thought the sacrifices were worthwhile because he could foresee potential benefits in the future:

> It's been worth it, because it's a chance that other people don't get. You have to have something that can get you in a position like this, and if you get here, you have to give it a good fair shot. If you become a professional, you earn money like it's ridiculous, so you might as well give it your best shot. I've got my whole life to go out and stuff.

P36 tried to put his work as a football player into perspective: "Yeah, it's better than ending up being in a factory or something, which some of my friends have seen, and they've told me it's awful." A coach thought that players should be mindful that the "financial rewards are so great at a club like this, it could be a very small sacrifice to pay to get to the top" (P46). Finally, P45 summarized the attitude of most of the players interviewed:

> Well, I've got friends who are enjoying what they are doing, no matter what they are doing, but I've got a career now, so I need to succeed in my career, and I have to make sacrifices to do that. If I want to be a professional footballer, I have to make those sacrifices now, but then later on in life, if I become a pro, then I know it's paid off.

## Commitment

Commitment (representing the motivational forces behind the pursuit of a soccer career) was characterized by the motives and strategies required to succeed. Elite English players possessed strong motives and planned their career development strategically based around certain personally meaningful goals (Figure 7).

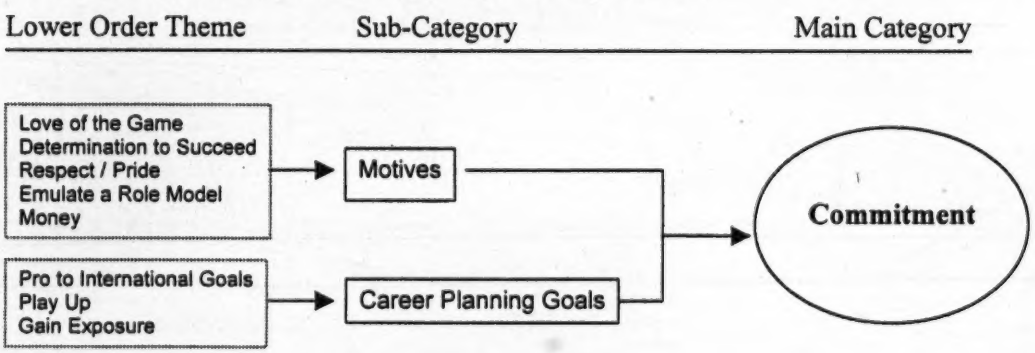


Figure 7. Conditions describing commitment (English data).

### Motives

Motives represent factors that influence the direction, intensity, duration, and quality of effort that adolescent players use in their attempts to become a professional soccer player. Motives included (a) love of the game, (b) determination to succeed, (c)

perceived social status, (d) emulating a role model, and, (e) earning money. These motives provided the necessary energy to make the sacrifices and conform to the expectations of a disciplined lifestyle.

Love of the game. An important motive to succeed identified by many players was an intrinsic love of the game. P29 said he played "just for the love of the game. If you love the game of football, you just want to play, and you just do it for the love of the game." The love of the game was fostered by dreams of being a professional player at very young ages. P40 said, "I started dreaming about playing professionally when I first started playing football, I was about seven. It's still a dream even now." P32 (coach) said becoming a professional player was "all I wanted to do for as long as I can remember." These extracts highlight how players' determination to succeed was tied to an intense love of the game that stemmed back to their childhood.

Determination to succeed. It was apparent that another primary motive adolescent soccer players possessed was an intense determination to succeed. One of the coaches, P32, thought that:

> To make it as a professional footballer, you've got to be very self-motivated, very disciplined, and you have to have a lot of determination. If you haven't got the determination to further yourself in the game, to go all the way to the top, you'll just fall by the wayside.

Many of the players reflected this determination to succeed. For example, P29 thought the most important quality he possessed was his determination because he was "determined as a person, and determined as a player." P43 reported similar qualities: "I've just got a desire to play football, it's in my heart and it's in my family." Reflecting on the motivation of professional star players, P44 said, "I think it's one of the things, it's their determination. Because they've got so much desire they are good professionals and they are good players… They've got that much determination."

Perceived social status. A professional soccer player in England commands status and certain privileges which are socially valued. Soccer players have traditionally been perceived as working class heroes, where it was every schoolboys' dream to play for the club they supported from the terraces (P41). P35 said, "I just want to be known. I want to

be on the pitch, and I want people to know who I am." P40 wanted "to play in front of a crowd of 50 000 people, screaming and shouting for me, that's a big thing that motivates me." P35 was motivated by "the success really. I really want the success." Social status goals were based on complex rewards like fame, status, and respect, and adolescent players reported they were motivated by the potential to earn such socially-valued goals.

Emulate a role model. Many of the players in England watched the world's top players and viewed them as role models. P45 explained how role models motivated him:

> Seeing other people and what they achieved pushed me more to be a footballer. Watching them play motivates me, and I think 'I want to be there'. Looking at people and thinking, 'that could be me at the end of the day.'

P33 said, "I think what motivates me is seeing Rivaldo [a top Brazilian international], and players like that on the TV, and you think 'I would love to play against them one day,' either playing for England or in the same team." English players enjoyed a great deal of exposure to these high profile players, either through constant television coverage in England, or by attending Premier league games. During the fieldwork trip, there was at least one game on television everyday, whether it was Premier league, lower divisions, cup competitions, Scottish football, or European games. In addition to televised games, football academies have their game schedules structured in such a way that scholars are able (and expected) to attend their respective clubs' first team home games. Ultimately, adolescent players in England are immersed in the culture of soccer and have many opportunities to observe and emulate roles models.

Money. In the 2000-2001 season, the average annual salary for a player in the English Premier League was reported in the media as approximately $1.25 million (Canadian) (£500 000) (Fieldwork entry). It was widely reported that the top earner in the Premier League was Roy Keane of Manchester United, who received an annual salary of $6.5 million, plus an advertising deal with sporting goods firm Diadora. Some players were quite candid about the financial benefits of playing soccer. P28 said he was motivated by "the flash cars, and the money and everything else" and P30 remarked, "it's good isn't it, getting loads of money for what you like doing?" During an informal

conversation about the financial aspects of modern football, one player told me to "go and have a look around the car park if you want to know about the money in football" (Fieldnotes, August, 2001). In fact, the car parks were more like executive car showrooms stocked by Mercedes, Porsche, and BMW.

It is important to note that adolescent players interviewed in the UK were mostly with clubs in the Premier League, where financial rewards are comparable to any league in the world. Young players worked in the same facility as a group of millionaires, some of whom were only a couple of years older than them. Although financial remuneration data was not collected in the current study, Parker (1996) reported that first year players with a major club received £160 per week (approximately $400 Canadian), with £225 ($560) per month deducted for accommodation fees. Despite the obvious presence of money in football clubs, and the huge differences in earning power between youth and senior members of these organizations, a number of players suggested that money was a bonus for playing football, and therefore did not represent a primary motive. For example, P33 thought that money "sort of comes along with football. But I would want to play football anyway I think, even if ... I've never really thought about money at all. I just want enough to get me there, and anything else is a bonus." P43 concurred, "it doesn't matter what league I play in, it doesn't matter how much money [I make], as long as I am playing football. It's not like money matters." He went on to suggest that, "there's too much money in the game. No player in the world is worth 80 grand a week [approximately $200 000]. It's ridiculous."

Career Planning Goals

Adolescent soccer players are faced with a number of strategic career choices as they pursue their ultimate goal of becoming professional soccer players. Adolescent English players became committed to several goals that were intended to benefit their soccer development. Specifically, they (a) placed professional goals before international goals, (b) played up, and, (c) sought to gain exposure.

Professional to international goals. English athletes reported a blend of international and professional aspirations, but becoming a professional soccer player was the primary ambition, whereas becoming an international player was a secondary aim. In

fact, English players perceived that becoming a professional with a good club was a vehicle to becoming an international. Every player interviewed said their immediate career goal was to become a full professional with the club they were currently playing with. Playing in the Premier League is virtually a prerequisite for selection to an English national team because of the sheer number of good players available in England.

Play up. During their academy scholarships, English players sought a higher challenge, reporting a desire to play against older players. For example, under-17 players wanted to play with the under-19 team, while under-19 players craved experience with the reserve team (the feeder team for the first team), and first team itself. P35 explained how he was rewarded for good performances by playing up, "Yeah, they put me up [to the under 19s], but I was playing for the under 17s last year as well, so I've done pretty well." P44 saw a functional aspect to playing up with more senior teams:

> If you play in the reserves you play against better players. Playing against better players will make you become more able, and you know what's coming up if you do play in the first team. I've played for the reserves a couple of times… you are playing against much better quality all round.

Gain exposure. Gaining exposure to appropriate training and competitive environments for players in England was a matter of either (a) selecting a top level club with excellent training facilities and high quality coaches, or (b) choosing a lower level club where the player would have more chance to play in the first team. The teams with the best facilities also tend to have the financial power to buy players, rather than wait for their youth players to develop. As such, players usually have a better chance of playing senior football (i.e., with the first team) with a smaller club (i.e., a club with less money) that may have inferior facilities. Given this situation, players made strategic choices about which clubs would offer the most appropriate environment for their personal development. P40 discussed his decision to sign with one of the largest (i.e., most prestigious and richest) clubs in the country:

> Everything is better here. As far as I am concerned, I can come here, and if things don't work out I can go to one of the lower league clubs, and I'm getting the best three years of coaching that's possible. So, I get that here,

> and I wouldn't get that at a smaller club. Then once I've had these years, and if things haven't worked here, then I could go to another club.

Alternatively, P32, an academy director with a 'smaller' club gave adolescent players the following advice:

> [I would say] not to go to a Man U or Liverpool [two of the most wealthy, prestigious, and successful clubs in European soccer], because if they want a player they buy him. Clubs like mine, we need the youth players, [because] we haven't got 5 or 6 million pounds for a player. Then if you are good enough at a smaller club, then the bigger clubs will come for you.

Interestingly, the club that was generally perceived to offer the best of both choices (i.e., excellent facilities and a reputation for playing young players) was Manchester United [the richest club in England, and possibly the world). However, one of the coaches (P42) from a club near Manchester explained how he believed that Manchester United's revered youth policy was a misnomer. He regularly saw players lured from his smaller club (where they would have more chance to play) to Manchester United. He thought many adolescent players were attracted to Manchester United because they had one year in the early 1990s where they brought a number of players through from the youth team into the first team, but since then, had hardly produced anyone of note (selling most of their youth players to lower division clubs). Whether this coach's view was accurate or not is debatable. However, the point is that adolescent players must make strategic career choices about the most suitable environments for their own personal development.

## Resilience

Resilience, defined as the ability to bounce back after adversity, trauma, and/or rejection (Piirto, 1999), is an important quality for aspiring soccer players to develop. Resilience was required to overcome certain potential obstacles, and a range of coping strategies were used to deal with competitive stressors (Figure 8).

### Overcoming Potential Obstacles

Potential obstacles that were perceived to create adversity for English players related mainly to family circumstances (parental pressure and traumatic experiences).

Additionally, some players were concerned by the threat that overseas players posed to their career development, and others worried about the damaging impact of injuries. Resilience behavior was required in order to overcome these potential obstacles.

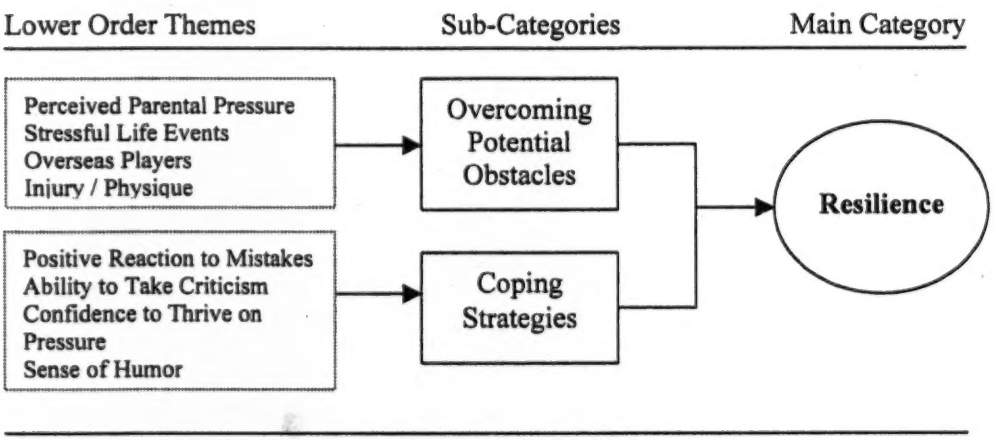


Figure 8. Conditions describing resilience (English data).

Perceived parental pressure. Although players generally thought parents were a source of support, many of the coaches felt that parents were often a problem. P41 said, "parents push too much. Parents will push and push and push, and if you just watch youngsters playing on a Saturday, it's the parents just wanting to play their life through them." Interestingly, few of the players reported their parents as a particular problem. P31 felt that an unstable family background affected many of his players: "I would imagine somewhere between 40 and 50 percent of our children come from broken homes. We've got alcoholics as parents, we've got parents who haven't got any transport [implying low socio-economic status]." The coach described circumstances that put adolescent players under extra pressure to succeed, and he believed that a number of the players at his club saw soccer success as a means to solve the (financial) problems their parents faced. He went on to say that "as soon as the parents put a name on a registration form, they think that is it, a multi-million pound contract, but that's not what we are about, we offer a very good football education program." It appeared that players required resilience in order to deal with these contextual factors.

Stressful life events. Although only a minority of players actually had experienced traumatic events (such as the divorce of their parents) those who had expressed a sense of perspective. Four players at one club referred to a player who they all knew, and P28 said, "There was my mate who was ready to sign a scholarship, and he had an accident, and he is crippled now, and it just goes to show how lucky I am, it puts things in perspective. I mean, you feel privileged." Some players also referred briefly to the divorce of their parents, but did not appear comfortable talking about some of their experiences in the interview setting. A coach thought that adolescent players actually lacked a sense of personal trauma and sacrifice: "I was brought up during the war. My Dad wasn't there. I had to fend for myself, and I became strong, mentally and physically" (P42). Overall, for players who reported stressful life events, such experiences apparently assisted them to develop a sense of perspective that helped them cope with the demands they faced in their pursuit of a professional soccer career.

Overseas players. One club had a number of players from South America, and local players were concerned that these players would eventually be selected for professional contracts ahead of them. There was a certain level of resentment expressed by some of the players at this club. P27 referred to the South American players as, "lazy, they are lazy. They've got unbelievable skill, but they are lazy." P28 felt he had missed out on the chance to develop his technical skills when he was younger, "There is a rule that Brazilians are not allowed to play matches until they are 14, so they have got so much time to practice. If we had practiced like they did from seven years old… [we would be better technically]." P29 agreed:

> We've got more match practice, but they have more skill, like from just kicking the ball against the wall, just working on their technique. I think the English game is ten years behind the foreign game. Like with all the academy teams, theirs have been set up a lot longer than ours.

Finally, P27 expressed his main concerns with overseas players:

> [We have] too many. We are working hard here, working hard to get through, and they just come in. It should be restricted, the number of

> foreign players per club. Some foreigners, there are English players who are loads better, but because they are foreigners, they just get into the side.

Overseas players were seen as a factor creating adversity that adolescent English players believed that had to overcome. Although players did not articulate how they tried to deal with this problem, it is plausible they demonstrated resilience behaviors in competitive settings to prove their worth as a soccer player.

Injury/physique. Elite soccer training and competition in England is traditionally based on physical values of strength, speed, and hard work. One of the implications of this style of play is the potential for injuries. As such, players must learn how to rebound from injuries if they are to successfully pursue a soccer career. The majority of reported injuries among the current sample were related to chronic overuse, but some came from acute collisions in competitive game situations. A sample of the injuries players faced included: torn ankle ligaments (P36), groin strain (P40), torn knee ligaments (P43), and head injury (P45). These were more serious injuries that kept players out of soccer for more than six weeks. P43 described how he was trying to recover from two operations on his knee: "I should be back playing within four or five weeks, but I haven't kicked a ball in six months. So, it's just get my head down, start again, start working again." His coach, P46 sympathized with the plight of this player:

> He's just had his second operation, and for somebody of 16 to just have his second cartilage removed is a problem, but he's took it on the chin and just got on with it the best he can. It's unfortunate for him, but you just hope that he's OK.

Given the intense physical demands of playing soccer in England, players tried to 'protect' themselves from injury by developing their physical size, strength, or speed. P28 wanted to become stronger, and P34 felt he needed to improve his overall fitness level. Players strive to overcome the potential obstacles imposed by their physical attributes through constant physical development and extra individual work.

Coping Strategies

English players used several specific coping strategies to deal with social and psychological stressors present in the competitive soccer environment. These coping

strategies were represented by the ability to (a) react positively to mistakes, (b) take criticism, (c) have confidence to thrive on pressure, and, (d) have a sense of humor.

Positive reaction to mistakes. Given that mistakes are inevitable across an athlete's career, players need to be able to react appropriately to mistakes if they are to make progress as a professional soccer player. P33 revealed his strategy for dealing with making a mistake:

> I try not to dwell on it too long, because after you make a mistake, you can't do anything about it. I try to get the ball back straight away if I could, or I try to get back into position, and try not to let it upset me too much.

The refusal to focus on a mistake was reinforced by P40: "You have to make sure that the next time you get things right, not dwell on it [the mistake]. You can't just hide from it, you can't hide away from the game." A goalkeeper (P35) employed a blocking strategy to control his cognitions after an error: "if you make a mistake, just take it out, put it in your boot [i.e., glove] bag, and forget it is there, because a mistake is a mistake." P35 had a mature view of the role of mistakes in his development as a player:

> I'm only young, and I'm going to make mistakes. If I never make a mistake, I'd be playing for the first team. If I make a mistake I don't kill myself over it, I think that the next time I'm going to make sure I do it right, rather than worry about it. I'll try to do something brilliant the next minute.

Players appeared to understand that mistakes were part of the soccer environment and were aware that it was important to react to errors in the appropriate manner.

Ability to take criticism. In addition to responding positively to mistakes, to make progress as a soccer player, "you've got to be able to take criticism" (P27). P28 described an incident in training where he had been criticized, and said his response was always, "if you get knocked back, you've got to be able to get your head up and go back." The ability to take criticism refers to accepting feedback from coaches. P35 described how he reacted to criticism to impress the coaches, "That's the main thing, never show you are

down, just keep going, they want to see that commitment from you." P36 realized that criticism from the coaches was not to be taken as a personal insult, and said:

> It's hard, but it comes over time. I mean, if someone is having a go at you, you think that he doesn't like you, but obviously he's telling you because he wants you to become a better player. You've just got to take it in the right perspective. I see what he was saying, then I try to put their view into action.

Although it was important to be able to take criticism from coaches, it was also important to ignore criticism from fans, as P29 said, "If you are getting slagged off [criticized] on the pitch by the fans or whatever, you just forget it." Players understood that coaches' criticism was an inevitable part of the sport and that the ability to respond to this perceived criticism was an important part of their development.

Confidence to thrive on pressure. Given the potentially stressful environment that adolescent players compete and train in (including the potential for making mistakes and receiving criticism) the ability to thrive on such pressure is a very important competency. P27 said the most important skill he needed to play was "confidence, definitely confidence. If you don't have that then you are buggered." P33 agreed: "I always seem to play better when I'm confident. If you feel good about what you have to do, then it always seems to come off better, it always seems to happen." P40 said that feeling confident helped him to cope under pressure:

> Say, for example, things aren't going well on the pitch, like you are giving it away when you get it. Well, I still want the ball. Like playing for the schoolboys [national under 16 team], there's a lot of pressure put on you, and it would be easy to hide, but you have to want the ball, and not give it away. I've always been like that, I've never wanted to hide because I am confident.

Some of the players realized that confidence could be a fragile concept, as P36 said "now and again it dips, but usually my confidence is high, I think I can do anything on the ball. I know I can't, but I think I could do it if I wanted to in any situation."

Sense of humor. Humor was a coping strategy used to deal with the psychological pressures faced by adolescent players. P36 said, "I'm playing football… We work hard, but we also have a laugh." P45 reflected that the club he was with at the time of the interviews encouraged a sense of humor more than his first two clubs: "here [present club] you have more of a laugh, and you enjoy the training more. It's serious, don't get me wrong, but everyone seems to enjoy it, and you get more benefit out of it. I think the more you enjoy training the more you want to do it, and that's a good way of coaching." A coach also highlighted the importance of bringing a sense of humor to the training situation, explaining, "The basis of our training is enjoyment. We say about telling players when they have done something wrong, but you have to have the enjoyment factor to bring them back" (P26). A sense of humor was used as a coping strategy to help the players manage the stressors they faced in their daily competitive environment.

## Social Support

The ability to perceive and use available sources of social support also helped players overcome obstacles that may have impeded their career progress. Three main categories of social support were evident for players from England: emotional, informational, and tangible support (see Figure 9).

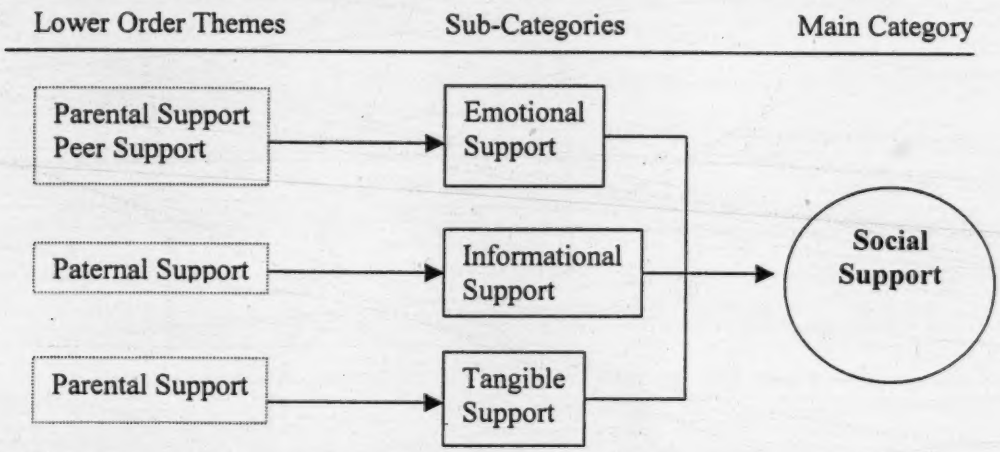


Figure 9. Conditions describing social support (English data).

Emotional Support

Emotional support is the ability to turn to others for comfort and security during times of stress, so that a person may feel cared for by others (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Emotional support was provided by parents and peers.

Parental support. Among the most important sources of social support were parents, as P33 explained, "my Mum and Dad help me a lot. I still live at home with my Mum and Dad and they support me with my soccer a lot." P43 thought:

> [My parents can tell when] I was frustrated, or when I was tired by my reactions around the house. You kind of know when there is something up with your own son. So they knew when to back off, then knew if I was on edge just to let me cool down for a day or two.

It was a similar case for P45, "My Mum and Dad have been the main ones. If I'm going through a bad patch, and they are there to tell me to just be more confident and I will come through it." Parents could be supportive through telephone calls, attending games, or simply being there for the adolescent players if they needed someone to turn to. For example, P39 said he felt support from his entire family:

> All my family, my Mum and Dad, sisters and brothers, coach, my friends, everybody really. They come over to watch me play [from Ireland]. It's hard being away from home, but I speak to them on the phone, and they encourage me every day."

Peer support. Friends were also perceived as a source of social support, as P35 said, "I've got good friends, they support me, they come and watch me." P36 experienced similar support: "My friends, they help a lot, they take an interest in how things are going." Although friends were mentioned as a source of social support by some players, friends did not appear to be as significant as parents for players in England as Canada.

Informational Support

Informational support provides individuals with advice or guidance about possible solutions to problems (Cutrona & Russell, 1990), and was exclusively provided by fathers of the English players in this study.

Paternal support. P33 explained how his Dad helped him: "He comes to all my games and he gives me advice on what I'm doing." Similarly, P44 said, "my Dad has been the influential one. He gives me a lot of good advice. He played when he was younger, and he was a very good player, so he knows the game." Many of the fathers of players in this study played soccer when they were younger, and as such had some experience and advice to offer. For example, P36 said, "My Dad helps me a lot. He comes to all my games. He played, and he had trials, and he played for a semi-professional club [so he knows the game]." Fathers could also provide informational support by negotiating with professional clubs, as P40 explained:

> It's my old man [father] that does all the talking with the clubs, when we do contracts and all that. Like when I had to make my decision about whether I was going to stay at [his previous club] or come here, he was the one who was on the phone.

Despite some coaches thinking parents could be a problem, P32 thought that some fathers could provide more informational support.

> If you can educate the parents to help a player realize that he's got to do an awful lot better, then maybe he starts getting a little bit of a push from his parents. You know, 'they said you weren't doing very well, you might not be there much longer', and it works both ways. Some Dad's don't realize, maybe because they are not football minded.

Tangible Support

Tangible support relates to concrete assistance given to a person to help him/her cope with a stressful event (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Both parents were reported as providers of tangible support in this study.

Parental support. The main form of tangible support provided by parents was transportation. While P40's father was responsible for negotiating with clubs, "he also had to work, so my Mum ran me around to the games when he was working. My Mum has actually been at games more." As this example shows, both parents worked together to provide tangible support (father by working, mother by driving). However, providing transportation to and from games was reported by many of the participants as the most

obvious source of tangible support they received from both of their parents (e.g., P30, P33, P35, P40).

Summary of English Data.

A summary of the findings of from the English participants is presented in Figure 10. Each of the four main psychosocial competencies are located within the context of the talent development environment in England.

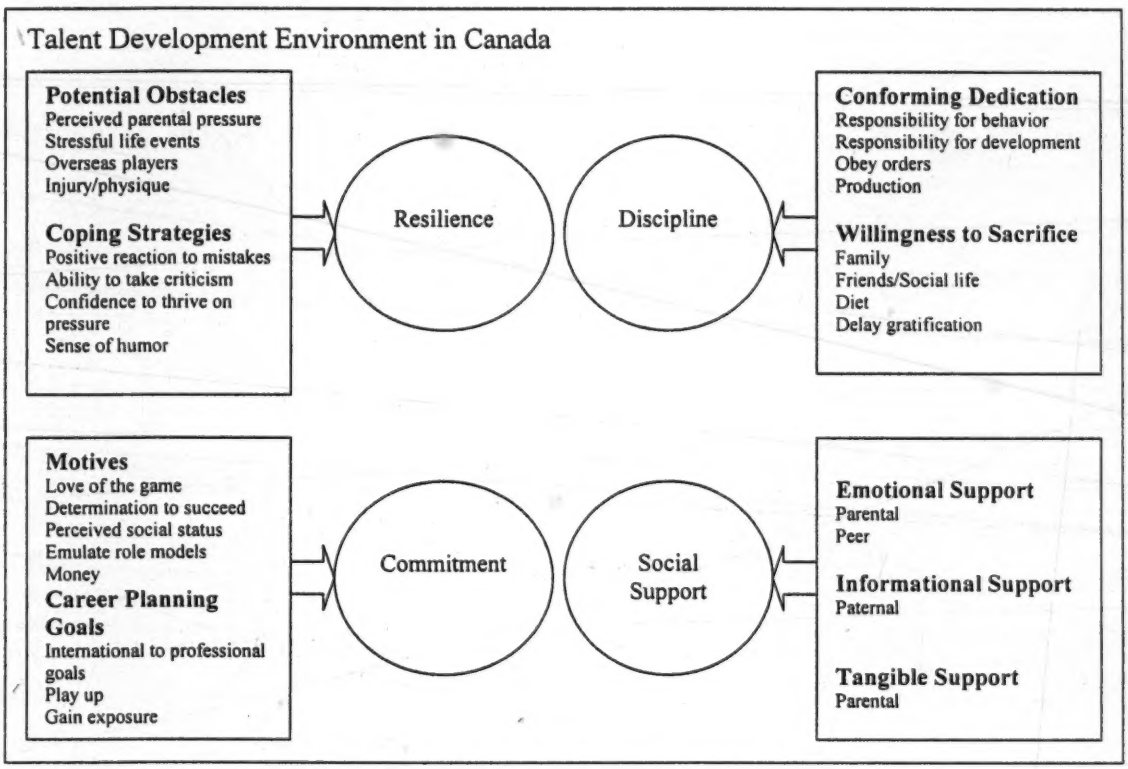


Figure 10. Summary of English data.

## Comparative Analysis of Canadian and English Data

Following the identification of factors that underpinned talent development experiences of Canadian and English soccer players, the second purpose of this investigation was to comparatively analyze similarities and differences between the emergent perspectives. Such comparisons are dealt with in the following section.

### The Talent Development Environment

Adolescent talent development occurs within an environment specific to both the individual and the sport system where the individual is located. For example, the findings of the present study highlighted unique aspects of the talent development systems for soccer in Canada and England. It appears that any theory of talent development must take into account the talent development environment created by a particular sport system.

One obvious difference between talent development systems in the respective countries is the physical environment. For example, soccer is a winter sport in England, but in contrast, a summer sport in Canada (and only played outdoors year-round in coastal British Columbia). Consequently, Canadian players do not get the same opportunities with respect to practice and play in comparison to their English counterparts. Furthermore, the physical infrastructure of professional soccer in England is vastly superior to Canada. There are 92 league clubs in the English professional league structure, some of which have been in existence for over 100 years. Canada has been unable to sustain a national professional league since the early 1990s, and currently has a combined total of only five professional and semi-professional clubs. At the youth level there are also major differences in the organization of soccer. In Canada, the CSA organize talent development, whereas professional clubs are responsible for nurturing talent in England. As a result, in England, players compete against other professional developmental teams on a weekly basis, to a maximum of 30 games over an 8 month season. The availability of competition in England is such that the EFA restricts the number of games that youth players are allowed to compete in, whereas Canadian players appear to seek *more* competition.

Despite these differences, there were some interesting socio-historical parallels between the Canadian and English talent development systems in soccer. In many ways

the talent development system in Canada mirrors the history of the English system. Currently, the CSA is entirely responsible for talent development through their national team programs, just as the EFA was 20 years ago. In England, professional clubs now play a greater role in talent development. However, because the professional club development system is so poorly developed in Canada, it is uncertain whether the Canadian system will continue to mirror English history. The CSA has plans for the development of the CUSL in the future, but this program is riddled with financial concerns. It seems reasonable to suggest that this aspect of the Canadian system mirrors the old English program for talent development because of the large English influence in Canadian society and the structure of soccer.

It is doubtful that soccer will ever come to occupy the place of hockey as the high profile sport in Canadian society. In fact, hockey in Canada in many ways emulates the value placed on soccer in England. The main drawback to becoming a professional soccer player in Canada appears to be the lack of a professional youth development system and associated professional leagues. These contextual differences have important effects on talent development. However, despite the differences inherent in the talent development environments of the respective countries, there were remarkable similarities in the psychosocial competencies adolescent players identified. These similarities can be explained by the fact that all players (both Canadian and English) were ultimately striving to become professional soccer players in Europe.

Conceptions of Ability

One aspect of talent development that was implicit within the data collected is that 'above average ability' as a competitive youth soccer player (i.e., age 10-14 years) is a prerequisite for entry into higher competitive and training environment. It is plausible that all participants in this study possessed above average ability (otherwise they would not have been performing at this level). Interestingly, it has been suggested that ability is often equated with physical size by coaches (Starkes et al., 2001), which may be related to relative age-advantages (based on birth month and eligibility dates). This suggestion led to a comparison of birth months between the players in the two samples (Table 1). Generally, more Canadian athletes were born in the early part of the year (i.e., January –

July), whereas more English athletes were born in the latter half of the year (i.e., July – December). Specifically, the mean rank of birth month for Canadian athletes was 13.39, whereas the mean rank of birth month for English athletes was 21.89, reflecting a statistically significant difference (Mann-Whitney U = 64.50, $p < .05$) in the mean rank order of the months when players in each country were born. That is, there was a statistical difference between the birth months of the two groups: Canadian athletes were born in the earlier months of the calendar year, whereas more English athletes were born in the latter months of the calendar year.

Table 1

Number of Players Born in Each Month Across Canadian and English Samples

| | Sample | |
|---|---|---|
| Month Born | Canada[a] | England[b] |
| January | 6 | 1 |
| February | - | 1 |
| March | 1 | - |
| April | 2 | - |
| May | 1 | - |
| June | 3 | 1 |
| July | 3 | 3 |
| August | - | - |
| September | 1 | 3 |
| October | 1 | 4 |
| November | - | 1 |
| December | 1 | - |

[a] n = 19 [b] n = 14

Discipline

Discipline, characterized by self-control and conformity, was reported as a crucial competency in the emergence of a soccer career. Adolescent athletes learned to live disciplined lives, conforming to their coaches' expectations by displaying dedication and a willingness to make personal sacrifices. It appears that athletes (a) were willing to accept discipline into their lives because they were determined to achieve their ambitions,

(b) were resilient in the pursuit of these ambitions, and, (c) received social support that helped them cope with the challenges they faced.

Both samples thought they were expected to be personally responsible for their behaviors as well as their development as an athlete. Both English and Canadian participants were able to recognize the importance of obeying orders and producing the required level of performance in games (and thus behaved in a manner that conformed to coaches' expectations). Players in both samples were willing to make sacrifices in order to pursue their soccer careers. A common theme was that in making these sacrifices, players were able delay gratification (i.e., believing that the rewards for these sacrifices would be reaped in the future). Some Canadian players reported sacrificing education, whereas some English players felt they had sacrificed aspects of their diet to maintain the necessary body weight.

Commitment

Sources of commitment were represented by motives which provided the necessary energy brought to bear to improving as a soccer player. Strong motives enable the adolescent athlete to work toward acquiring the properties of resilience and discipline in their sport. Participants set goals which served to direct their commitment to becoming a professional soccer player. These goals reflected strategic career choices involving the selection of the most appropriate environments for their development.

Motives were generally quite similar between English and Canadian participants, revealing the importance of a love of the game as a motive underpinning their commitment. Athletes also possessed an intense determination to succeed at soccer. Motives related to perceived social status were related to notions of fame, earning respect, and making parents proud. Participants in both samples were partly motivated by financial rewards, but generally thought that money was a bonus for playing soccer as opposed to a primary motivating factor. The most obvious difference among motives between the two samples related to role models. English players were generally motivated to emulate the top players they grew up watching. In contrast, Canadian players had a wide range of male role models, but many tended to focus on the career of

Owen Hargreaves (the Calgary-born player who is now achieving success with one of Europe's top clubs).

In terms of career planning goals, English players prioritized professional ambitions before international goals, but this trend was reversed among Canadian players. All players tried to plan their career development by selecting the most appropriate environments in which to best further their soccer abilities in order to become a soccer professional. Canadian players sought to 'play up' during their childhood in order to gain exposure to more competitive soccer environments. English players did not report playing out of their competitive age grouping during childhood, presumably because they were training with the younger teams (e.g., under-12, under-14) of football academies where the competition was very high anyway. Interestingly, English and Canadian players planned on playing up during the latter stages of their adolescent soccer careers (i.e., against adults). English players chose professional clubs on the basis of (a) the quality of facilities and coaching, and (b) the chance to make enough progress to play in the first team. Although Canadian participants reported a similar decision-making process, they were primarily concerned with gaining exposure by using Canadian national teams as a stepping stone to find a team in Europe.

Resilience

To pursue their ambitions in elite soccer, adolescent athletes learn to become resilient, which means they have the ability to bounce back from setbacks that might occur. Some of the skills of resilience are not easily acquired. For example, sacrificing family life at age 15 is a difficult task, yet adolescent soccer players learn to become resilient, apparently because their ambitions are valued to such an extent that they warrant these sacrifices. In this way, resilience influences both ambition and discipline.

Both samples reported the need to learn to rebound from contextual and competitive factors that were perceived as creating adversity. At the contextual level, all participants reported parental pressure as a potential obstacle that they needed to overcome. Well-meaning parental support was sometimes perceived as pressure. Some English coaches believed that parents perceived their child's soccer career as a road to

financial stability. Other family-related stressors (e.g., divorce of parents) apparently enabled some of the participants to become stronger.

Canadians experienced some difficulty becoming accepted by local European players when they arrived at European clubs. In contrast, English players reported the threat of overseas players reducing their chances of success, which corroborates the Canadians' perception of lack of acceptance overseas. Some English players thought that overseas players had an advantage because they focused on technical development rather than competition when they were younger (although it is unlikely they were referring to Canadians here). Canadians faced problems related to the relative lack of importance given to soccer in Canada, and they had to overcome the lack of a national professional league competition, the absence of a professional training infrastructure and associated professional attitude. Finally, players who wanted to leave Canada typically had to overcome legal obstacles in terms of obtaining working visas if they did not have European born family members. English participants were concerned about overcoming injuries, and looked to develop their physique as a means to protecting themselves from injury.

In terms of developing the ability to deal with competitive adversity, both sets of participants said it was important to remain fully engaged in the game after a mistake, and to ensure that they did not 'hide' on the field. It was also important to learn to take criticism from coaches, and be confident (particularly in regard to wanting the ball in pressurized situations). Participants reported that a personal sense of humor could be a useful coping strategy, though this must be balanced with showing a professional approach to soccer.

Social Support

The perceived availability of social support also appeared to facilitate the development of psychosocial competencies for many of the athletes in this study. Different functional aspects of support may help athletes acquire discipline and develop resilience. Social support was provided by a range of significant others, but parents were the most important sources of support for the athletes from both samples. For example, emotional support provided by both parents was important to both Canadian and English

participants. This type of support involved parents acting as someone to turn to during times of stress (e.g., homesickness). Peers provided an alternative source of emotional support as a release from the tensions of soccer for Canadian participants, and were also mentioned by English participants. For both samples, paternal informational support was available in the form of soccer-specific advice, although coaches were also important sources of advice for Canadian athletes. Finally, both parents were reported as sources of tangible support, providing transportation and financial backing for players in Canada and England.

# CHAPTER 6:
# DISCUSSION

A range of psychosocial competencies and environmental conditions underlying the talent development experiences of elite adolescent soccer players from Canada and England were identified in this investigation. Results suggested that the acquisition of discipline (characterized by conforming dedication and a willingness to sacrifice) reflects the intense and valued commitment elite players make to their sport during adolescence. Furthermore, processes of interaction between commitment, resilience, and social support facilitated the necessary psychosocial competencies for elite adolescent athletes to engage in a disciplined pursuit of a professional soccer career. These findings appear to represent the commencement of the *investment years* suggested by Côté (1999), the *stage of perfection* proposed by Bloom (1985), and the transition to *full-time involvement* presented by Ericsson et al. (1993).

## Talent Development Environment

In accordance with previous research on giftedness and talent development (in both sport and non-sport settings), present findings indicated that talent development was based on goal-oriented individuals reciprocally and successfully interacting with their environment (van Leishout & Heymans, 2000). Gould et al. (2001) found that exposure to the sport system helped with the development of psychological talent for US Olympic champions. The cross-national comparative element of the present study highlighted how perceived and actual differences in the Canadian and English soccer systems influenced talent development. Indeed, many aspects of the soccer development system in Canada actually appeared to impede talent development (e.g., lack of exposure, lack of professionalism) in the eyes of the Canadian respondents. This example reinforces the notion that social structures and soccer culture operate in conjunction with personal qualities to produce athletic success (cf. Carlson, 1988). It seems that a theory of talent development should be located in the context of the relevant talent development environment.

## Relative Age-Advantage

Above average ability as a child was proposed as a pre-requisite for entry into elite adolescent soccer. This trend has been mirrored in other performance domains. For example, children and adolescents are primarily judged on their technical proficiency in music (Ericsson et al., 1993). Young people who are not identified as having talents are less likely to be offered the help and encouragement they need to attain high levels of performance (Howe, Davidson, & Sloboda, 1998).

It appeared that selection to higher levels of performance was also related to relative age influences. Findings indicated that players were born earlier in the year in Canada, and later in the year in England. Helsen et al. (1998) showed that prior to 1997, when the FIFA international soccer eligibility age-group cut-off birth date was August 1st, beginning in the 6-8 year age group, players born in the early part of the selection year (August-October) were more likely to be identified as talented and selected to higher levels of coaching. In a follow-up investigation of the post 1997 era, when FIFA changed the eligibility date to January 1st, Helsen, Starkes and Van Winckel (in press, cited in Starkes et al., 2001) found that players born in January-March were now more likely to be identified as talented. January 1st is widely used in the Canadian system because it is geared toward producing players for international competition. However, the English professional club system have been less inclined to adopt this ruling (because they are not responsible for the English national team), and players are still grouped by their school grade eligibility date of August 1st. Therefore, variations in birth month between English and Canadian players demonstrate that participants in both samples appear to have benefited from relative age effect.

There are robust findings that children with relative age effect advantages are selected to higher levels of competition in soccer, with consistent evidence from youth international to professional levels (Barnsley, Thompson, & Legault, 1992; Brewer, Balsom, & Davis, 1995; Verhulst, 1992). However, relative age effect findings have not been integrated with talent development research before (i.e., no relative age effect findings have been published in the psychological talent development literature). Given the data presented in the current study and associated previous research, it seems reasonable to speculate that many players identified with above average ability as

children experienced relative age advantages. Further research is required to establish connections between relative age effects and psychological aspects of talent development.

## Discipline

Although above average ability is required for selection to more elite levels of competition, there is compelling evidence to suggest that innate physical abilities do not reflect the superior performance and achievement levels of elite athletes. Howe et al. (1998) found little evidence for innate talents in the development of music expertise, and individual differences in basic capacities and abilities are poor predictors of adult expert performance (Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson & Lehman, 1996; Régnier, Salmela, & Russell, 1993). Existing research shows that talent development requires years of commitment to learning (Bloom, 1985), long-term adaptation to the constraints of deliberate practice (Ericsson et al., 1993), and the development of self-discipline to manage time and priorities (cf. Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001). Durand-Bush and Salmela emphasized that the levels of commitment and sacrifice displayed by elite athletes should be given special attention in future investigations of talent development.

Previous research shows that successful athletes possess discipline (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Csikszentmihayli et al., 1993; Donnelly, 1993; Ericsson, et al., 1993; Gould et al., 2001; Kalinowski, 1985; Monsaas, 1985; Shogan, 1999). Self-discipline is also an important quality high-achievers in education and the performing arts possess (Ericsson et al., 1993; Renzulli, 1978). The current study makes an important extension to the existing literature by describing the properties of disciplined behavior that form a central component of talent development. Discipline was defined as self-control and conformity, and was reflected by conforming dedication and willingness to sacrifice that enabled elite adolescent athletes to maintain their commitment to training and competition.

### Conforming Dedication

Developing increased personal responsibility for behavior reflects the increasing independence and responsibility that is normally associated with adolescence (Blos, 1967; Brettschneider & Heim, 1997; Josselson, 1980). The responsibilities involved with becoming a professional soccer player may require adolescent athletes to adopt similar

behaviors, attitudes, and responsibilities as those displayed by their adult counterparts. Normally, individuals have attained full adult status and privileges by *late* adolescence, rather than middle adolescence (Steinberg, 1993). The early adoption of adult (soccer) roles may lead to the premature acquisition of an athletic identity because athletic reputations and identities are constantly confirmed by peers, parents, and others (Kalinowski, 1985; Monsaas, 1985; Stevenson, 1990; Tiihonen, 1994). Although athletic identity has been related to negative psychological outcomes regarding self-image following retirement from sport (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990), the development of an athletic identify may be an inherent part of elite sport. Indeed, Gould et al. (2001) suggested that Olympic champions had difficulty separating their sport and self-identity, but the implications of this finding for psychological well-being during a career are not clear. More research is needed to identify if there are both adaptive and maladaptive aspects to the development of an athletic identify at a relatively young age.

Athletes in the current study also assumed personal responsibility for their career development, rather than expecting their coaches to do it for them. The importance of a long and extended period of practice is well established in the talent development and expertise literature (Bloom, 1985; Ericsson et al., 1993). Furthermore, the suggestion that athletes are expected to become more responsible for their learning, skill development, and behavior at increasingly elite stages of sport participation has been supported in the literature (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001; Parker, 1996; Stevenson, 1990). Personal responsibility for development was expressed, in part, by individuals becoming responsible for their practice regimen. Ericsson et al. (1993) found that talented violinists rated practicing alone as the most important activity related to improving violin performance. However, Hodges and Starkes (1996) found that international level wrestlers spent more time practicing with others than practicing alone. Although some players reported practicing alone, the majority appeared to spend more time practicing with others (12 hours per week). Interestingly, time spent practicing with a team compared favorably with the individual practice of award winning musicians who practiced for 13.7 hours per week at age 13 years, and 15.5 hours per week at age 17 years (Kaminski, Mayer, & Ruoff, 1984; Ruoff, 1981; both cited in Ericsson et al., 1993).

However, the duration and frequency of individual practice was not measured in the present investigation. Further research is needed to establish the frequency and benefits of individual practice time for team sport participants.

The 'demand to produce' is important because players are judged by their performances in competitive games at the professional youth level. Bloom (1985) also reported that competition performance was used as a measure of progress during the stage of perfection. Production, along with obeying orders, was related to the importance of conforming to coaches' expectations for performance. Such notions of conformity have previously been associated with the discipline required of high performance athletes, and athletes engage in a variety of self-policing activities to incorporate the values of being a 'good' athlete into their behavior (Shogan, 1999). However, conformity has not been extensively discussed in talent development research. The need to obey orders could well be related to the demands of team versus individual sport. That is, due to the high number of complex interactions in a team sport, it is important that all team members carry out their responsibilities (i.e., follow coaches instructions) appropriately to ensure team success (Gréhaigne & Godbout, 1995).

Willingness to Sacrifice

Another aspect of conformity and self-control related to players' willingness to sacrifice factors that may interfere with their adherence to a disciplined lifestyle. Elite athletes are extremely dedicated and are prepared to sacrifice important activities for certain periods of their lives in order to pursue athletic success (Orlick & Partington, 1988). Family was sacrificed by both sets of participants. Unfortunately there does not appear to be any evidence in the sport science literature pertaining to the psycho-emotional impact of leaving home for adolescent athletes. It appears that disciplined adolescents are able to cope with the problems associated with being away from home if they possess resilient qualities and perceive the availability of social support.

Adolescent soccer players learned to control their social lives in order to adopt a lifestyle that facilitated their progress toward a professional career. Living a 'clean' lifestyle has been related to successful athletic development by elite track and field athletes (Vernacchia et al., 2000) and trainee soccer players (Parker, 1996), and is an

obvious demand facing those interested in pursuing an athletic career. These factors can only be considered a sacrifice if they were previously valued by players. Furthermore, there is the potential of social desirability responding here, as the participants may have reported the behavior expected of them rather than their actual behavior. Future research including long-term observation of elite adolescent athletes would help to establish the patterns of social behavior young players actually engage in habitually.

Soccer players limited their social interactions with friends. The peer group tends to become more important during adolescence (Brettschneider & Heim, 1997; Coleman & Roker, 1998), but the demands of elite sport often necessitate the constraint of social interaction with peers. Some athletes thought they had missed out on the 'normal years' of growing up. Reducing social activities has previously been identified as a cost of involvement in elite sport (Bloom, 1985; Donnelly, 1993; Gould et al., 2001). Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) concluded that talented teens were aware of the conflict between productive work and peer relations. It appears that adolescent athletes in the present study were able to control potentially distracting social interactions with friends, while maintaining peer relationships that could provide sources of emotional support. Given the increasing influence of the peer group during adolescent stages of development, more attention to peer relationships in youth sport is required (Brustad, 1996; Weiss, Smith, & Theebom, 1996).

Canadians cited the loss of their education as another sacrifice that was made. Problems balancing the dual time demands of sport and school have been previously reported by adolescent athletes in Germany (Brettschneider, 1999) and Canada (Donnelly, 1993). Education was not reported as a sacrifice by English players, presumably because they all attended vocational colleges for approximately 12 hours per week as part of their soccer scholarship. However, Parker (1996) suggested there is a disaffected attitude toward education in English football, where college is merely viewed as an escape from the daily routine. The dominance of football in the lives of adolescent English males has also been associated with boys' academic under achievement in high school (Skeleton, 2000). It may be the case that education was not valued by the English participants, and therefore was not perceived as a sacrifice.

English players reported that certain dietary demands were necessary sacrifices to make in order to live a disciplined lifestyle. Dietary problems are typically associated with female participants in aesthetic sports. For example, Donnelly (1993) reported that concerns about body shape, body image, and eating patterns were virtually nonexistent for male athletes, except for a wrestler's concerns about 'making weight.' English players may have been concerned about their diet because they were frequently weighed at their professional clubs. It is important to note that English players were apparently concerned with physical characteristics as they may hinder performance, rather than their 'body image' *per se*. Nonetheless, the combination of dietary and physique concerns is a worrying trend given the increasing training demands associated with the transition from competitive youth to professional adult soccer. Costill et al. (1988) found that some swimmers experienced chronic muscular fatigue because their calorific intake was insufficient to accommodate increases in training activity. Dietary concerns should be closely monitored in professional sport environments.

Overall, players in the present study were able to make sacrifices and delay gratification because they realized and valued the potential benefits that could be attained in the future. Continual striving and deferred gratification are valued means of achieving in sport (Eitzen & Sage, 1993). As one elite champion track and field athlete in Vernacchia et al.'s (2000) study said, "Just remember down the line you'll be successful, it may not be tomorrow. It may not be the next day" (p. 18). Furthermore, Ericsson et al. (1993) argued that because deliberate practice does not lead to immediate social or monetary rewards, individuals must be willing to delay gratification to overcome motivational constraints. The concept of delaying gratification appears to be an important element of talent development in soccer.

## Commitment

As already established, adolescence is a period that requires intense commitment to achieving sporting success, and elite performers must possess high levels of motivation to sustain this commitment. Uncovering motivational factors which enable people to engage in the years of practice needed to become an expert performer is a crucial area for investigation (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001; Ericsson, 1996; Starkes et al., 2001).

Consequently, the current study contributes to the existing literature by identifying several important motivational dimensions that appear to underlie the commitment of elite adolescent athletes. Specifically, it is suggested that the combination of motives and strategic career goal planning provides motivational pathways to excellence during adolescence.

A sport commitment model (Scanlan et al., 1993) has been presented in the youth sport literature based on the social psychology construct of commitment (Kelley, 1983). Determinants of sport commitment include sport enjoyment (attraction to sport), personal investments (in the activity), social constraints (i.e., the impact of social norms), and involvement opportunities (the promise of future opportunities only derived through involvement in the sport) which are all predicted to have a positive influence of sport commitment. Alternatively, involvement alternatives (i.e., alternatives to sport participation) are predicted to have a negative influence on sport commitment. Research has shown support for the sport commitment model in youth sport settings (e.g., Carpenter & Scanlan, 1998; Weiss, Kimmel, & Smith, 2001). The concept of commitment as used in the present study is consistent with elements of the sport commitment model. In particular, the proposed determinants of sport enjoyment, personal investments, and social constraints are reflected by the motives and goals discussed below.

Motives

Motives were similar for Canadian and English players. The 'love of the game' motive may represent a form of intrinsic motivation, which is described as engaging in an activity purely for personal pleasure and satisfaction derived from doing the activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The development of an intrinsically motivated intense passion for work has been identified as an important element for talent development in several achievement domains (Benbow, 1992; Bloom, 1985; Corno & Kanfer, 1993; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Gould et al., 2001; Piirto, 1999). On a related issue, Ericsson et al. (1993) argued that deliberate practice is not inherently enjoyable. They justified this comment by suggesting that athletes would practice uniformly all-year round if they enjoyed deliberate practice. Contrary to Ericsson's suggestion, soccer

players in the current study reported that they did engage in off-season athletic and strength training on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, research has shown that athletes do perceive deliberate and relevant practice to be enjoyable (Starkes et al., 1996; Young, 1998 cited in Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001). Ericsson's original work was with musicians, so this finding might not be generalizable to sport. Love of the game reflects an intrinsic motivation toward participation in soccer, suggesting that the pursuit of discipline and sporting success is, at least in part, enjoyable. Furthermore, enjoyment has demonstrated a strong influence on sport commitment among junior tennis players (N = 198, ages 10-18 years) (Carpenter & Scanlan, 1998). Specifically, decreases in sport enjoyment and involvement were associated with decreases in sport commitment, whereas increases in enjoyment and involvement were associated with increases in sport commitment over time. Enjoyment appears to be an important variable underpinning commitment.

Several athletes thought their determination to succeed was a factor that set them apart from less successful players. Gould et al. (2001) suggested such determination reflected high personal standards, which can be considered as a dimension of perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Players were also motivated by the acquisition of perceived social status (earning respect and making parents feel proud). Such motives have been classified as social (approval) goals by achievement motivation theorists in educational psychology (e.g., Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Wentzel, 1999). Social goals have also previously been identified as motives for sport participation. For example, social status motives (to be popular with others and to feel important) were rated highest by high school and college age individuals (15 to 22 years) in a study of lifespan differences in participation motives for competitive swimmers (Brodkin & Weiss, 1990). Scanlan, Stein, and Ravizza (1989) suggested that the social recognition of competence was characteristic of sport enjoyment for former elite figure skaters. Similarly, sport sociologists have identified the importance of gaining respect as a motive underlying the pursuit of athletic careers (Donnelly, 1993; Messner, 1987, 1990a, 1990b; Parker, 1996). Identifying the nature of such social goals underpinning talent development may lead to a more thorough understanding of motivation and achievement in elite adolescent sport.

The concept of modeling is one of the most powerful means of transmitting values, attitudes, and patterns of thought and behaviors (Bandura, 1997). A significant role model for Canadians was the young soccer player who grew up in Calgary and successfully secured a starting role with a major European team. The success of a single person with whom other athletes can personally identify has been previously cited as a powerful motivational influence in talent development (Carlson, 1988). If an observer perceives similarity between him/herself and the role model in terms of skills and status, motivation to perform like the model is enhanced (McCullagh & Weiss, 2001). Parents and relatives who had achieved soccer success were important role models for a number of the players. It is well-established that parents are primary sport socialization agents for their children's initial involvement in sport (Brustad, 1996; Greendorfer, Lewko, & Rosengram, 1996). Previous research has also suggested that children are more likely to reach high levels of performance if their parents have also competed at a high level (Kay, 2000; Rotella & Bunker, 1987). For example, a disproportionate number of NHL hockey players' fathers played professional hockey (Birch & Curtis, 1988, as cited in Hill, 1993).

Earning money was a source of extrinsic motivation (and may be another way to earn respect) for some athletes, but was reported as a bonus of professional soccer participation by others. Differences of opinion over the importance of money as a motivational factor may reflect research that suggests extrinsic rewards are not necessary for the enjoyment of intrinsically interesting activities (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Financial benefits have not been identified as participation motives in adolescent sport (which may be indicative of the lack of research in professional sport contexts). It has been suggested that the recently acquired financial strength of professional soccer in England has led to more importance being placed on financial rewards by adult players (Carpenter & Yates, 1997; Fynn & Guest, 1994). The absence of research with professional athletes makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the motivational role that financial rewards play in contemporary talent development in professional sport.

Descriptive research consistently reveals that children's motives for participating in a variety of (non-elite level) sports are based on experiencing feelings of competence (e.g., learning new skills), affiliation (e.g., making friends), competition (e.g., to win),

and fun (e.g., for excitement) (e.g., Brodkin & Weiss, 1990; Gould, Feltz, & Weiss, 1985; Wankel & Kreisel, 1985; Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989). However, athletes in the current study reported some motives that differed from previous investigations, which may be related to their advanced professional level of competition. It has been suggested that motives differ across levels of competition. Ewing, Feltz, Schultz, and Albrecht (1988) examined participation motives among 15 to 19 year-old male hockey players at three levels of competition (midget, midget elite, and junior national). Athletes at all three levels rated the desire to go on to a higher level as their most important reason for participating in hockey. Junior national team players rated winning as the second most-important factor, whereas the two midget groups identified skill improvement as the second most-important participation motive. Klint and Weiss (1986) found that competence, fitness, and challenge were important motives for elite, recreational, and former elite gymnasts, but fun was not a significant motive for the elite group of competitors. Taken together, this research suggests that motives change as athletes progress through different levels of competition and different stages of their career. The present findings also suggest that no one set of particular motives apply to all people. Motives may be idiosyncratic, which creates the need for idiographic analysis of individual profiles. Furthermore, as the motives of the elite soccer players may change as they advance in terms of their career, longitudinal studies are required to track changes in motives over time and levels of elite sport competition (cf. Petlichkoff, 1996).

Career Planning Goals

Planning strategic career goals reflects the ability to set proximal *and* distal goals that are meaningful and emotionally rewarding. Goal-setting may be reflective of more advanced cognitive reasoning capacities that are characteristic of middle adolescence (cf. Piaget, 1950). The ability to set and achieve goals was identified as a characteristic of successful US Olympians (Gould et al., 2001) and high-achieving self-regulated learners (Zimmerman, 2001). Distal goals were the ultimate aim of becoming a professional soccer player. Proximal goals reported by athletes in this study included playing up in an older age group to access higher levels of challenge and competition, which has also been reported as an element of talent development in other sports (Monsaas, 1985). It is likely

that athletes were moved up during childhood because they were more physically skilled than their peers (i.e., they demonstrated above average ability, as previously discussed). Learning to adapt to the associated challenges of an older competitive age group may help prepare athletes for the demands of elite competition. On the other hand, because physical skill does not necessarily correspond with cognitive, emotional, or social ability, playing up may lead to the possibility of rejection by older group members, social isolation, and other psychological challenges (Weiss, 1991). The psychological consequences of playing up require further empirical examination.

Intermediate goals reported by participants included the selection of appropriate competitive environments where players believed they would gain the necessary exposure they required. It has been proposed that high-achievers engage in environmental structuring to create the most effective settings for learning, and seek the most suitable teachers or coaches for their development (Bloom, 1985; Crews, Lochbaum, & Karoly, 2001; Zimmerman, 2001). Choosing the most suitable environments for development was based on a decision between access to coaching and facilities versus opportunities to make progress and (ultimately) play in the first team. Canadian players accepted (as part of their career planning) that they would have to leave home to be in an environment that allowed them to pursue their ambitions.

## Resilience

Adolescent soccer players learned to become resilient, successfully rebounding from adversity and overcoming obstacles. Resilience has been identified as a personality characteristic that many talented people in the academic domain possess (Block & Kremen, 1996; Ford, 1994; Noble, 1996; Van Lieshout, Scholte, Aken, Haselager, & Riksen-Walraven, 2000), and as an important strategy for successful adaptation during adolescence (Coleman & Roker, 1998; Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1985; Werner, 1990). Although the trait of resilience has yet to be extensively examined in sport, the ability to overcome adversity and obstacles has been previously identified as an important element in the development of elite track and field athletes (Gould et al., 2001; Vernacchia et al., 2000). Similarly, athletes have reported that their elite sport participation enabled them to deal with stress and crises (Donnelly, 1993; Scanlan et al., 1989). Resilience may be an

important quality for adolescent athletes because a range of competitive stressors inherent in youth sport have been associated with several negative outcomes, including decreased fun and satisfaction (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984), physical injury (Smith, Smoll, & Ptacek, 1990), deteriorated performance (Gould, Eklund, Petlichkoff, Peterson, & Bump, 1991), burnout (R. E. Smith, 1986) and, sport withdrawal (Smith & Smoll, 1996). As such, the identification of coping strategies that enable talented athletes to display resilience in order to overcome potential obstacles may have important implications for competitive youth sport.

Overcoming Potential Obstacles

A range of potential obstacles created adversity that soccer players dealt with in the pursuit of their career. Parents could provide various types of social support, but perceived parental pressure was also an obstacle adolescent athletes had to overcome. In the talent development literature, parents have been almost unanimously described as a positive, supportive influence in the lives of elite athletes. However, youth sport research shows that parents can have negative influences on their child's sport participation when they become over-involved and put unreasonable pressure on their offspring to achieve (Barber & Sutko, 1998; Brustad, 1988; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984; Scanlan & Simons, 1992; Weiss, Weise, & Klint, 1989). Parental pressure may also be subtle, whereby athletes perceive a sense of obligation to their parents (Donnelly, 1993). It appears that adolescent soccer players were able to cope with perceptions of parental pressure, but it is likely that parents were generally more supportive than pressurizing.

Participants reported becoming mentally stronger as a result of having learned from stressful life events because they were able to gain a sense of perspective and rebound emotionally. The ability to cope with traumatic personal experiences is a fundamental form of human growth, and a crucial part of the developmental process (Aldwin, 1994). For example, in sport, Vernacchia et al. (2000) reported that dealing with the death of a parent was an obstacle some elite track and field athletes learned to cope with in their development. Coping resources can be overtaxed by the experience of several stressful events in close proximity (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). It may be

important to monitor adolescent athletes who experience stressful life events that coincide with other transitions (such as becoming a full-time soccer player).

A number of English players were concerned with physical factors, such as injury and physique. English soccer is traditionally a very physically demanding game, where physical strength and speed are much admired (and needed) attributes. Injury and fatigue have previously been identified by adult athletes as important factors to overcome in the development and success of athletic careers (Côté, 1999; Ericsson et al., 1993; Vernacchia et al., 2000). Overtraining injuries among young athletes are widely reported in the literature (Rowley, 1992), and injury has also been reported as a significant occurrence in professional youth soccer in England (Fisher, 1996). Indeed, empirical research with 27 professional soccer players in England revealed that the pressure exerted on players (by management) to continue playing through injury exacts a heavy cost from many players in terms of pain, injury, and long-term chronic disability (Roderick, Waddington, & Parker, 2000). Adolescent players were clearly cognizant of such expectations, and realized that they had to meet the physical demands of English soccer in order to make progress.

There were a number of contextual factors Canadian soccer players had to overcome. Canadian athletes generally perceived that their sport delivery system for soccer actually impeded their progress because they did not receive sufficient exposure to competitive soccer, and the existing system lacked a professional atmosphere and infrastructure. Similarly, the lack of adult professional sport was perceived to have a negative influence on Canadian athletes in Donnelly's (1993) study. The English soccer system may have been more beneficial for talent development. Indeed, Gould et al. (2001) suggested that the sport process and sport program organization helped psychological development among US Olympic athletes by instilling positive qualities and providing positive environments. Differing talent development systems appear to have varying influences on the talent development experiences of athletes.

Lack of acceptance overseas was an obstacle Canadian players perceived as they sought to pursue their careers in Europe. Interestingly, English players thought overseas players were an obstacle that they faced. In English soccer, it is likely that the threat of

overseas players is a recent phenomenon. An important EU political decision called the 'Decree on the Un-remunerated Sport Participant' (better known as the 'Bosman' ruling) refers to a Belgian soccer player who fought for a free transfer to another club without an exorbitant transfer fee having to be paid (De Knop, Wylleman, Theeboom, De Martelaer, van Hoecke, & van Heddegem, 1999). In effect, this decree made the existing transfer system in professional soccer illegal and provided players with greater freedom of moving from club to club. This ruling, in combination with the rights of all EU citizens to work freely in any EU member country, will no doubt further increase the number of players from mainland Europe in English professional soccer in the future. For non-EU players, complex eligibility criteria must be fulfilled in order to play for European teams.

Coping Strategies

Participation in elite sport can be extremely stressful for adolescent athletes (Gould & Eklund, 1996; Goyan & Anshel, 1998). Although there have been numerous studies of stress and coping in sport, only a few investigations have examined coping strategies used by children and adolescents. Because children and adolescents differ from adults in their cognitive capabilities and coping skills (Compas, 1987), it is important to examine stress and coping across developmental periods. Previous studies have identified that sources of acute stress for adolescents include injury, coach or parental criticism, conflicts with opponents, and physical and mental errors (Anshel & Delany, 2001; Crocker & Isaak, 1997; Goyen & Anshel, 1998; Kowalski & Crocker, 2001). These findings corroborate the results of the present study.

Given that mistakes are an inevitable part of elite sport performance, the sport-specific strategy of 'not hiding' after a mistake is an important behavioral coping response. Players in the present study also reported the importance of learning to deal with criticism. The implicit assumption here is that coaches provide criticism on a relatively regular basis. Indeed, Parker (1996) observed English professional coaches extensively using verbal authoritarianism (abusive language, personal castigation, and scornful humor) when interacting with players. However, an observational study conducted by Cushion and Jones (2001) of eight professional youth soccer coaches who worked with adolescent soccer players in the UK revealed that coaches used a praise to

scold ratio of 9:1, and instructional behavior accounted for approximately 60% of verbal interactions. Nonetheless, players in the present study reported that learning to deal with criticism was an important psychosocial competency they acquired. It is plausible that players perceived (or described) certain instructional messages as criticism. Furthermore, there may be the possibility of social desirability response bias here in that it is a necessary part of the sub-culture of professional soccer to 'be a man' and deal with criticism. Long term observational studies of coach-player interactions, and player reactions to criticism is required.

Given that elite adolescent athletes consistently perform in potentially stressful situations, where every performance may impact their sporting future, having the confidence to perform under pressure is an important attribute. Of course, confidence is widely accepted as an important characteristic in the development of an elite sport performer (e.g., Carlson, 1988; Donnelly, 1993; Gould et al., 2001; Orlick, 1992; Vealey, 1986; Vernacchia et al., 2000). The important factor identified in the present study was that players possessed a genuine desire to want the ball during critical periods of a game. Game criticality is a concept that has recently received attention from sport psychologists (Bar-Eli & Tractinsky, 2000; Dunn & Nielsen, 1996; Krane, Joyce, & Rafeld, 1994). Interestingly, lower quality of performance (measured by decision-making) has been identified in highly critical game situations in international basketball (Bar-Eli & Tractinsky, 2000). It seems that athletes in the current study viewed critical game situations as opportunities, rather than threats, although this assertion requires further testing.

The present findings suggest that elite adolescent soccer players used humor as a coping strategy to help deal with the demands of practice and competition. The prevalence of humor in professional youth soccer environments has been established elsewhere (Cushion & Jones, 2001; Parker, 1996). Lefcourt (2001) reviewed evidence from general psychology evaluating the value of humor as an effective means of coping with stressful experiences. He concluded that 'perspective-taking' (where people distance themselves from their experiences and do not take their successes or failures too seriously) might be the most important use of humor for coping with stressors.

Although there are a potentially vast number of coping responses, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested that coping responses tend to be used either to regulate emotions (i.e., emotion-focused) or to alter the situation to change the unfavorable person-environment relationship (i.e., problem-focused). In this study, positive reactions to mistakes and taking criticism appear to be emotion-focused coping strategies, involving the regulation of responses to stressful situations. Furthermore, humor has previously been categorized as an emotion-focused coping strategy (Lefcourt, 2001). Developing confidence to thrive on pressure appears to be some type of re-framing strategy involving the positive interpretation of critical game situations, and therefore also appears to be an emotion-focused response. Consequently, none of the strategies reported were aimed at actually changing the perceived stressor in the environment (i.e., problem-focused). This may be related to absence of feelings of control over the sport environment, which is not unusual in elite sport environments (Pensgaard & Ursin, 1998). Theory suggests that in situations that are perceived as uncontrollable and unchangeable, emotion-focused coping strategies are most appropriate (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

## Social Support

Social support, in its broadest sense, refers to social interactions aimed at inducing positive outcomes (Bianco & Eklund, 2001), and is therefore a situational resource that facilitates coping. Social support is a multi-dimensional construct that includes structural (support networks), functional (support exchanges) and perceptual (support appraisal) features (Vaux, 1988). Perceptual features of social support were reported in the current study (i.e., athletes' appraisal of the availability of support). Measures of *perceptions* of being supported (rather than measures of actual support behaviors), have been associated with positive coping benefits (Sarason, Pierce, & Sarason, 1990). In the talent development literature, it has been widely suggested that athletes' perceptions of the presence of a supportive family is important in the development of sporting success (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Carlson, 1988; Côté, 1999; Kay, 2000).

### Emotional Support

The family can act as a source of emotional support that increases the likelihood that children will cope effectively with the (non-sport) stresses that confront them (Howard & Madrigal, 1990; Valentiner, Holahan, & Moos, 1994). In sport, parental support has been positively correlated with children's enjoyment and enthusiasm (Babkes & Weiss, 1999; Brustad, 1988; Laff & Hoyle, 1995; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Woolger & Power, 1993), perceived competence (Brustad, 1992), and self-esteem (Laff & Hoyle, 1995). Other research on parental influence in youth sport has focused on how parents influence their children's self-perceptions, motivations, and affective responses to sport (Brustad et al., 2001), rather than the role of parents as a source of social support. In the current study, parental influence was presented as a source of social support that enabled elite athletes to cope in different ways with the stressors they encountered.

Sarason et al. (1990) proposed that people high in perceived support know they have the resources to confront difficult situations, so they are less likely to view events as stressful compared to people low in perceived support. Accordingly, Sarason et al. suggested the buffering hypothesis, which proposes that the social support people perceive when facing stressors will facilitate coping behaviors and buffer the negative effects of stress. In an elite professional soccer school setting in The Netherlands, Van Yperen (1998) reported that adolescent players who rated their chances of dismissal from the school at the end of the year as 'high' had low scores on perceived availability of parental support. Yperen (1998) concluded that both parents provided emotional support as a buffer to the stress of competition in the development of elite soccer players. In an earlier study with a comparable sample of elite adolescent soccer players, Yperen (1995) suggested that when the personal performance of a player was below average (as rated by his coaches), the player's interpersonal stress (e.g., problems with teammates) was less intense if he thought that he could count on the support of his parents.

Talent development research also shows that parents take a great deal of interest in their children during the investment years, providing emotional support to help them deal with setbacks such as injury, pressure, and fatigue (Côté, 1999). A paradox is that parental social support is required for dealing with stresses, yet adolescence is characterized by increasing independence from the family. Indeed, Gould et al. (2001)

reported that the majority of Olympic champions in their study experienced decreasing involvement of their parents as they made progress in their adult athletic careers. The current findings indicated that parents continued to provide emotional support for their athletically gifted children during adolescence, and that this support helped the children cope with the stresses of elite sport. However, the relative influence of parents may decrease as the athlete matures, and athletes perceive that they sacrifice spending time with their family in order to pursue their soccer career.

Studies generally suggest that during early adolescence peers are important sources of physical competence information (Horn & Hasbrook, 1986, 1987; Horn & Weiss, 1991). As people move into later adolescence, internal, self-referent sources of information are most favoured in assessing competence (Brustad et al., 2001). However, in the current study, peers were perceived as sources of emotional support, rather than sources of competence information. Friends provide support for athletes as they develop (Côté, 1999; Gould et al., 2001) and can help athletes cope with emotional crises resulting from injury, de-selection, and general sporting pressure (Rees & Hardy, 2000). General psychology literature proposed that youths in middle adolescence typically look to their peers for support and equal relationships (Brown, 1990; Payne & Isaacs, 1999). Typically, as children get older, the importance of parental support diminishes as they turn more to their peers for emotional support (Rosenfeld, Richman, & Hardy, 1989). For example, Coleman and Roker (1998) showed that English youngsters face a significant turning point at 15 years of age, when they turn to peers with similar problems as their own, rather than to their family. However, a study of healthy US adolescents (M age = 15.7 years) by Frey and Röthlisberger (1996) showed that parents are still the most important source of social support at this age, but other sources of support, such as friends or a partner, become more important as the adolescent gets older.

There is an increasing body of knowledge concerning the concept of friendships in youth sport (Weiss et al., 1996; Weiss & Smith, 1999). Youth sport friendships may produce feelings of companionship, self-esteem, personal enhancement, prosocial behaviour, loyalty, and occasionally some conflict (Weiss et al., 1996). Higher perceptions of friendship have been associated with positive affective outcomes (A. L.

Smith, 1999). Although youth sport friendship offers interesting avenues for future research, the notion of peer support presented in the current study appears to differ slightly from the concept of youth sport friendships. That is, in the current study participants reported that friends *outside* of elite soccer provided a release from the tensions they experienced in their 'work' environment (e.g., Canadian players played basketball with friends to forget about soccer). The supportive influence of friends outside of soccer could be because teammates view each other as *competitors* for a professional contract as opposed to friends. Interestingly though, the soccer players in this study reported sacrificing their friends/social life to pursue training programs, but peers remain an important social influence.The concept of youth friendships, both within sport and outside of sport, is a particularly interesting area for future research with adolescent populations.

Informational Support

The athlete's father was the primary source of informational support. Hardy and Crace (1993) pointed out that whereas emotional and tangible support can be provided by almost anyone, providers of informational support have expertise relevant to the area in question. Previous research has suggested that paternal support is more important than maternal support for adolescent male athletes (Hill, 1993; Jambor, 1999; Robinson & Carron, 1982; Yang, Telema, & Laakso, 1996). Unfortunately, these previous studies failed to differentiate between emotional, informational, and tangible support and the differential role played by male and/or female parents. However, anthropological and adolescent psychology research shows that although both parents have an influence on their sons, the major parental influences on adolescents (and the majority of time spent together) are divided by gender (D'Angelo, Weinberger, & Feldman, 2000; Schlegel & Barry, 1991). In all likelihood, fathers were probably able to provide most of the informational support because of their prior personal involvement in soccer.

Canadian participants reported that their coaches were a valuable source of informational support. Supportive coaching relationships have been identified as an important part of the talent development process in other sports (Carlson, 1988; Côté, 1999; Gould et al., 2001; Greendorfer et al., 1996; Hill, 1993). Coaches have also been

identified as an important influence on the psychological development of young athletes (Black & Weiss, 1992; Brustad et al., 2001; Smith & Smoll, 1996; Weiss, 1991). There was some evidence for this with Canadian under-17 players, whose coach taught them principles of imagery. In England, coaches appeared to be rather distanced from players and were not perceived as playing a key role in psychosocial development. Indeed, few coaches in England even described themselves as having a role in the psychosocial development of their players, which implies there may be grounds for educational programs in this area.

Tangible Support

Both parents were able to provide tangible support to athletes in the present study. The most important tangible support provided by parents was travel assistance to games, and financial assistance so that adolescent athletes did not have to worry about working in part-time employment. Ericsson et al. (1993) acknowledged the importance of people being prepared to pay for training and provide transportation (for child and adolescent performers). Transport may be more important than financial support because soccer is a sport that requires little equipment, and has a relatively low economic impact compared to some other sports (such as tennis, figure skating, hockey, football, etc.). The provision of tangible support by parents is supported in the existing literature with samples from the USA, UK, Canada, and Australia (Bloom, 1985; Coakley, 1998; Côté, 1999; Hill, 1993; Kay, 2000; Kirk, Carlson, O'Connor, Burke, Davis, & Glover, 1997). Kirk et al. (1997) examined the socioeconomic impact for 222 junior athletes involved in a variety of sports in Australia. They found that over half the parents of gymnasts and tennis players spent over $1000 annually so that their children could participate in sport. Coakley (1998) found that parents of young hockey players in the USA spent between $5000 and $16 000 per year on fees, equipment, travel and other hockey-related expenses. Côté and Hay (2002) reported that parents of elite figure skaters in Canada spend between $10 000 and $20 000 a year for their children's participation. Rowley (1992) revealed that the costs of supporting 12 year-old British swimmers doubled by the time the child reaches 14 years, and that overall, families of elite junior swimmers spent up to 12% of their total income on their child's sport. In fact, children are more likely to achieve high levels of

performance if they come from a family in a high socioeconomic group (Yang et al., 1996).

# CHAPTER 7:
# TOWARD A GROUNDED THEORY OF THE PSYCHOSOCIAL COMPETENCIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS THAT INFLUENCE THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS OF BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL SOCCER PLAYER

The final objective of this investigation was to develop a theory explaining the psychosocial competencies involved in becoming a professional soccer player. Following the conceptual ordering of the data and integration of findings with pertinent previous research, a theoretical framework describing how elite adolescent athletes strive to become professional soccer players is presented (Figure 11). It is useful to place results within an organizational framework that is coherent with the extant literature to see where and how a theory fits (Charmaz, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Overall, it appears that becoming a professional soccer player involves the successful negotiation of three developmental stages. In the first stage, children must demonstrate above average ability to join a professional club. The second stage represents the period when an adolescent player joins a professional organization. If adolescents demonstrate the required qualities during the second stage, they are selected to become a full-time senior professional player (stage three). The theory presented here details transitions that occur during the second stage of professional development (the other stages are provided to contextualize the theory).

## Stage One: Competitive Youth Soccer

Children who can demonstrate above average ability at competitive youth soccer are selected for more elite levels of competition, ultimately leading to their involvement with a professional soccer club. Technical skill and physical qualities appear to be the crucial abilities children must demonstrate to be recruited to professional organizations. Because of the emphasis on physical and technical performance (rather than the potential to develop these qualities) children who possess relative-age effect advantages are more likely to be selected to higher levels of performance. Those children who are not selected may continue to play soccer, but not in the professional system. Usually these children do

not become professional soccer players, so selection procedures during childhood are of vital importance to later development and achievement.

Stage Two: Elite Adolescent Soccer

Successfully negotiating the transition to professional adult soccer rests on the development of discipline, commitment, resilience, and the perceived availability and use of social support. It is the interaction of these factors that facilitates talent development. Certain situations do not provide the necessary exposure to professional soccer (i.e., Canada), so athletes must move to a suitable soccer environment. The most suitable soccer environments are countries where soccer is culturally valued as an important sport and professional soccer clubs, rather than soccer governing bodies, are responsible for youth development (i.e., Europe).

Discipline involves conforming to coaches' expectations and developing self-control over one's activities and behaviors. Successful players take personal responsibility for their own behavior and development as a player, rather than expecting their coaches or parents to be responsible for them. Players are involved in compulsory intensive training for about 12 hours per week with their team, but also should engage in practice alone to maximize their development. However, adolescent players are not judged on their training habits. Instead, they are judged by the extent to which they can produce the required level of performance in competitive game situations. To produce the required level of performance, players are expected to obey their coaches' orders rather than be creative. Players who do not understand the demand to produce and who fail to obey their coaches' orders create additional obstacles that are likely to impede their progress toward becoming a professional soccer player. To maintain a disciplined approach to soccer, players must be prepared to willingly sacrifice important activities, such as time spent with family, social life, diet, and education. Players are able to make these sacrifices because they understand that the rewards for their behavior will be realized in the future if they become a professional soccer player. That is, they are able to delay gratification.

Elite adolescent soccer players must possess high levels of motivation to sustain their commitment to disciplined training, competition, and lifestyle. Commitment

provides the drive and determination that enables an individual to make the sacrifices needed to maintain self-discipline. Players draw energy from a range of motives, including an intrinsic enjoyment of soccer, determination to succeed, earning social status (which may include notions of fame, respect, and pride), and emulating role models. Extrinsic factors such as money and fame may provide a motive for some players, but they are generally not primary motivating factors. Given these motives, players set and achieve goals as they plan their soccer career. Proximal goals involve playing up and the selection of professional clubs that meet players' needs for coaching and opportunities to play at a higher level. Distal goals revolve around professional or international ambitions as an adult soccer player.

Adolescents must be able to cope with the social and competitive pressures inherent in professional youth soccer environment. Resilience enables the adolescent athlete to cope with certain potential obstacles that may interfere with the development of discipline and the transition to a professional career. Obstacles that must be navigated include dealing with perceptions of parental pressure, stressful life experiences, and setbacks caused by injuries. At the macro level, being born in a place that views soccer as a primary sport and therefore supports it financially is an advantage. Canadian soccer players are required to move overseas, where they are not immediately accepted because local players may feel threatened by the new competition.

Several coping strategies appear to influence the development of resilience. Players learn to react positively to mistakes and deal with criticism. They require confidence to thrive under pressure, and view critical moments in games as opportunities to show their worth. Players also use humor as a means of coping. These emotion-focused coping strategies enable athletes to regulate their responses to perceived stressors in the professional youth soccer environment, which is important because they have little control over their situation. Taken together, these factors represent the resilient characteristics players require in their pursuit of a professional soccer career.

Perceived availability and use of social support also appears to enable adolescent athletes to cope with factors impeding the acquisition of discipline and a professional soccer career. Adolescents perceived a number of available sources of social support, but

parents are the most important resource. Specifically, both parents provide emotional and tangible support. Peers provide emotional support, and coaches can be a source of informational support. However, the most significant source of informational support appears to be the father.

It appears that ability *per se* does not predict selection to professional adult soccer. If players are able to master the psychosocial competencies outlined here, it is proposed that they will have a greater likelihood of being selected for professional adult soccer. Those players who are cut may re-enter soccer at a lower level (i.e., lower divisions, semi-professional, or amateur). In summary, if a player maintains a disciplined lifestyle, makes the necessary sacrifices, develops enough commitment, is able to rebound from setbacks, and receives adequate support, he potentially increases his chances of moving on to the next level. If not, it is likely he will stay where he is until these conditions prevail. If these conditions do not prevail, he will most likely drop out. Each level is more demanding, and there is more competition for limited space, so only a select few make it to the top.

Stage Three: Professional Adult Soccer

The successful negotiation of elite adolescent soccer results in a young player being awarded a professional contract. It is likely there are further tasks to be negotiated at this stage for an adult soccer player to become a success (i.e., to become a 'top' professional). For example, with new found wealth and status, aspirations and motives may change, and professional soccer may bring new challenges. Further research is needed to understand more about the demands of a professional soccer career.

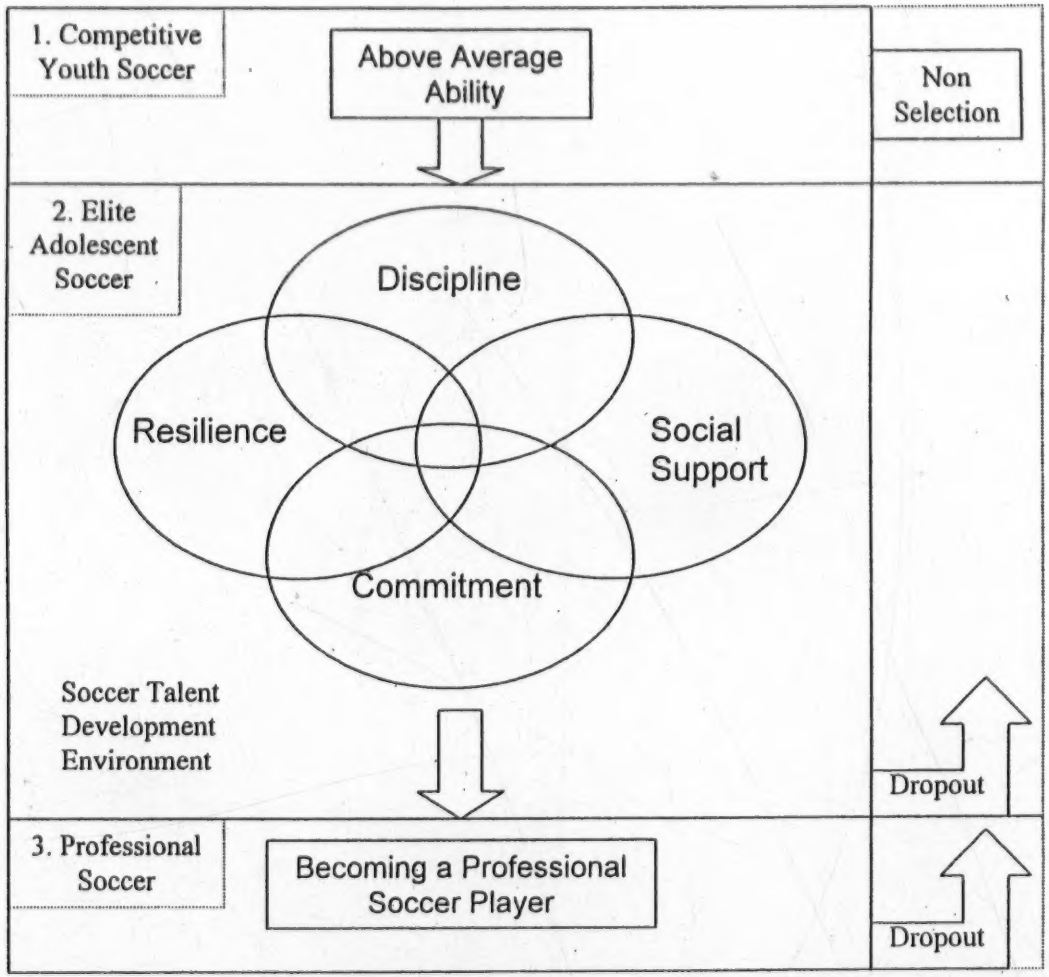


Figure 11. Toward a grounded theory of the psychosocial competencies and environmental conditions that influence the developmental process of becoming a professional soccer player.

# CHAPTER 8:
# IMPLICATIONS

The present study benefited from a representative sample of elite adolescent athletes drawn from two countries. The appropriate use of rigorous methodological procedures and analytically sound principles produced an internally coherent investigation. That is, the purpose, philosophical assumptions, methodology, data collection, data analysis, results, and interpretations drawn from those results followed a coherent line of reasoning. As it stands, the theory evolved from this research only applies to the group that was studied. However, the theory provides a foundation for studying other groups of soccer players and other athletes who aspire to reach professional leagues (e.g., in baseball, rugby, cricket, etc.). Accordingly, future research may modify or extend the theoretical framework presented here.

In general, the current findings were supported by the existing talent development literature. For example, the importance of a supportive social environment (especially parents) and dedication to practice have been identified as factors that benefit talent development in a variety of sports (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Gould et al., 2001). However, the current study makes an important theoretical contribution to the talent development literature by showing that the development and interaction of certain psychosocial competencies (discipline, commitment, resilience, social support) that enable individuals to successfully interact with their environment are crucial to talent development. Therefore, the current findings reinforce the notion that talent is about the successful *interaction* of people with their environment (Van Lieshout & Heymans, 2000).

Previous talent development research has focused on participants in individual sports because it was thought that team sport participants rely on other people (i.e., teammates) to succeed (Monsaas, 1985). However, this study showed that whereas teams might rely on effective contributions from each member to be successful, talent development in a team sport is still an individual task. That is, individual players from developmental teams are selected to progress, rather than entire teams. As such, although there are certain unique social factors in the teams sport environment that adolescent

players must manage, the current findings show that talent development in team sports has an individual focus.

Although it has been previously suggested that motivation and commitment are required for talent development (Côté, 1999; Bloom, 1985; Ericsson et al., 1993), this study made a significant contribution to the literature by identifying motives adolescent athletes possessed. Of particular importance was the identification of intrinsic, extrinsic, and social goals, revealing that a range of motives underpin the pursuit of achievement in sport. Furthermore, adolescent athletes appeared to plan their development by setting (and achieving) proximal, intermediate, and distal career goals. The psychosocial competencies related to commitment are foundational to the pursuit of sporting success, and the current study provides a basis for further research in this area.

Resilience is an increasingly popular topic in child development and educational research, and the current study is the first to specifically apply resilience to talent development. Resilience may be a concept that enables adolescent athletes to achieve success. Moving beyond the study of athletes from intact middle-class families may represent an important future direction that enables researchers to identify the qualities successful athletes from less than favorable backgrounds possess. This research direction will be especially valuable in the UK, where there are notable variations between the class level of children involved in different sports, with soccer traditionally representing lower-class individuals (Duncan, 1997). Furthermore, lone-parent households are the fastest growing type of family in Britain, which by 1995 had the highest proportion of lone-parent families in the European Union (22%) (Cooper, 1999).

By differentiating between the functional significance of social support, an important contribution was made to understanding the roles of respective parents in talent development. These findings may have significant implications for parenting practices in the future, but it is not yet clear how parents show emotional support without being perceived as a source of pressure. Furthermore, some complex issues were raised in connection with peer support. Although the peer group exerts considerable influence over adolescents, athletes in this study were able to curb potentially distracting peer interactions. Also, it seems that parents continue to have an important influence on elite

athletes during adolescence. Further research regarding the influence of the peer group and family during adolescent talent development sequences is required to understand the specific nature of peer and family interactions. The model provides guidance for future research in this area.

Boundaries of qualitatively derived theories are established by the context and not by the researcher's arbitrary goals for delimiting scope (Morse, 1997). It should be noted that the model is bound to the experiences of young men during the period of middle adolescence. Limiting the gender boundaries of this research is an important issue in developmental psychology because many early theories were derived from observation of male subject pools and may not be applicable to females (cf. Gilligan, 1982). Furthermore, caution is required drawing causal inferences from the type of data collected in the present study. This was not an experimental design, no research was conducted with athletes that were not at an elite level, and participants were not longitudinally monitored to assess their success as an adult performer. The theory presented here will be subjected to further scrutiny, development, and empirical examination. Theory is an on-going work in progress rather than established fact, and this important caveat was emphasized by Morse (1997):

> Treating theory as a fact is a pitfall for both qualitative and quantitative researchers because investigation ceases. When theory is treated as fact, it becomes a 'wall' that blinds the investigator, threatening validity and inhibiting inquiry (p. 172).

In addition to future replication of the current study, it may be important to consider alternative/complementary factors that potentially influence the psychosocial competencies involved in becoming a professional soccer player. Personality factors were not measured in the current study, but certain themes identified may reflect personality constructs. For example, perceived parental pressure is a dimension of socially prescribed perfectionism, and high personal standards an individual dimension of perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Furthermore, Gould et al. (2001) suggested that US Olympic champions in their study possessed perfectionist tendencies. Additionally, the motives revealed by participants in the present study may be representative of certain achievement

goal orientations that influence their development as athlete. Van Yperen and Duda (1999) argued that elite Dutch adolescent soccer players required both high task and ego goal orientations to survive in competitive soccer environments. Such personality constructs may represent fruitful avenues for future research on talent development.

Longitudinal analysis of player development over phases of a soccer career is an important future research direction. Interestingly, coaches in England reported that drop-out rates are much higher after the three years of a youth scholarship than during the transition from childhood to adolescent (professional) soccer. Research suggests that generally only 50-60% of teenage trainees (scholars) remain in professional football by the age of 21 (Parker, 1996). Long-term investigations are vital if our current knowledge of developmental sequences adolescent athletes experience is to expand. In particular, research with successful and unsuccessful (i.e., those who are cut) soccer players through each of the phases of the model is required to strengthen its predictive validity.

It is intended that practitioners can use the model presented here as a heuristic to build educational programs that are sensitive to the needs of elite young athletes. The findings presented here provide practitioners with a stronger scientific basis for their interventions with developing athletes. Some general practical suggestions for athletes and practitioners arising from this investigation are:

(1) Athletes should be aware of the importance of self-control and conformity in the pursuit of a professional soccer career.
(2) Cultivating sources of commitment (i.e., motives, goals) may help adolescent athletes pursue their professional aspirations.
(3) Resilient coping strategies are required to deal with obstacles that hinder the pursuit of a professional soccer career.
(4) The perceived availability of social support facilitates effective coping and adaptation to the demands of elite adolescent soccer.

A more comprehensive list of potential practical implications for talent development is presented in Appendix 7.0. Although this list contains a series of prescriptions for talent development, psychologists have suggested that attempts to *instruct* people with a generic set of coping skills may not be the most productive

counseling approach. Neimeyer and Levitt (2001) proposed that a narrative approach whereby people attempt to *construct* their own idiosyncratic self-narrative marked by resilience and resourcefulness would be an effective educational strategy. Any educational programs arising from this research should be subjected to evaluation and analysis in order to assess how to stimulate learning (cf. Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Henschen, 1998).

There is a great deal of concern with making intensive training and competitive programs in youth sport responsive to the interests and developmental needs of children and adolescents (Coakley, 1993). The theory presented here may assist in the creation of educational programs that are sensitive to athletes' needs. It is hoped that this information will be used to help athletes develop so that they can achieve their ambitions. To return to Shakespeare, it seems that successful adolescent athletes may be able to 'achieve greatness' based on the developmental processes they negotiate, but, as Howe (1999, p. 182) warned,

> We cannot map people's lives in advance, but much can be done to make desirable outcomes more likely. Acquiring high abilities is one such outcome. We can and should act to make it happen more often.

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# APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1.0. Information letter sent to coaches.

Dear [Name of Coach],

I am a Ph.D. student at the University of Alberta, conducting my thesis with young soccer players in Canada and England. I am interested in the stresses they face and how they deal with them. Partly as a result of my experiences as a schoolboy player with a lower division club in the UK, I am interested in what it takes for players to make it as a professional.

As I mentioned, part of my study is with young players (aged 15-20) in England, with the rest of the sample being drawn from Canadian players. I am visiting a number of the "academies" affiliated with professional clubs in England later this summer. I hope to find out information that will enable more young players to successfully overcome any barriers they may face (especially psychological ones).

I would like to ask your permission to visit [your team] with a view to interviewing some (6-7) of the players. Additionally, I would like to interview you about your views on what it takes for a player to make it. I am available to travel to [location] virtually any time this summer.

If you would like to participate in the study, the information I collect will be made available to you in a written report once my Ph.D. is completed. The identity of all players and coaches in the study will remain confidential. The information gathered in this study will enable coaches to better understand young players' needs and, help coaches prepare players for the demands of professional / international football. I ensure complete confidentiality, and the strictest ethical principles will be enforced (the study has been approved by the University of Alberta ethics committee).

Please let me know if you are interested in allowing me to visit a camp, and participating in an interview yourself. I have approached some players successfully so far, but it would make things far more straightforward if I could visit when they are all together! I hope the information I collect will be useful for the development of Canadian and English soccer.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank-you for taking the time to read this letter.

Regards,

Nick Holt

APPENDIX 2.0. Extract from fieldwork diary: Gaining entry.

When I arrived at the first setting, having flown from Edmonton to Toronto, I met the coach in the lobby of the residence. The first thing he told me was that I was not going to be allowed to interview any of the players because he was worried about "player power." Confused, I sat at a picnic table outside the residence as the players returned from their morning practice. One player I knew saw me and came over to chat (although I am sure the coach would have frowned on this had he been present). After exchanging pleasantries with the player, I explained my trip appeared to be futile. The player described the atmosphere of the team, and revealed that the coach had been particularly hard on the players over the last few days. It seemed that he was unhappy with some performances, and had been working almost extensively of fitness as a punishment. Furthermore, the coach had a reputation in the media as a fitness fanatic, who emphasized physical prowess at the expense of technical expertise. As I chatted with the player more, I realised the coach was worried that the players might vent their feelings about him to me (and, possibly, that this information might be learned by a wider audience). I supposed he felt his position was a little threatened by recent negative media attention, and wanted to protect his position.

Armed with this new information, I thanked the player for his frankness, and set off to find the head and assistant coaches. We went for lunch (they paid!) where I spent over an hour assuring them of complete confidentiality, explaining the study, and most crucially, reassuring them that I was not going to ask questions about their coaching. I went through every question on my interview guide, and gave them both a copy. Finally, I name-dropped some mutual friends we shared, and told the coaches they were welcome to call these people to check my credentials. It also helped that I had conducted previous research with the women's team during their world cup training camp. Eventually the coach agreed to let me solicit players from the group, provided he could listen to what I said. When I spoke to the team, 10 of the 20 players agreed to be interviewed. I was lucky to meet the player I knew, and equally lucky that I did not give up or lose my temper when the coach first refused access.

APPENDIX 3.0. Information letter to players.

Working Study Title: **Becoming an elite soccer player**

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**Purpose and Background:**
My name is Nick Holt, and at the moment I am conducting a study looking at the psychological and social pressures faced by young soccer players (aged 15-20). I am interested in the psychological skills young players use to deal with the pressures they face in competition and training environments. As well as talking to the players, I would like to talk to you about your perceptions of the issues young players encounter, and what you think it takes to make it as a professional / international player.

**Procedures:**
If you agree to participate in this study, I would like to interview you for about one hour. Later, after the interview has been transcribed, I will ask you to check the transcript - this should take you about 30 minutes.

**Benefits:**
The information I collect will be analyzed, then written up in a report. This report should contain information to help coaches and sport psychologists better understand psychological aspects of youth player development. You will receive a summary of this report.

**Risks:**
Given the instrumentation used to collect information in this study (i.e. interviews), the risks associated with participation revolve around the disclosure of personal or sensitive information. This may make some participants feel uncomfortable. To guard against this, every step will be taken to ensure anonymity (see below).

**Confidentiality:**
To ensure anonymity, personal information will be coded and stored in a locked office to which only the investigators will have access. Also, when you check the interview transcript, you can ask me to remove anything you do not want to be there. Data is retained for a period of five years post publication, after which they will be destroyed. Neither the players you coach, nor rival coaches, will receive any information that has been directly attributed to you.

**Freedom to withdraw:**
If you decline to continue, or you withdraw from the project, your information will be removed from the study upon your request.

**Additional contacts:**
If you have concerns about this study, you may contact the Dr. Debra Shogan, Associate Dean (Research and Graduate Studies) at (780) 492-5910. The Associate Dean has no direct involvement with this project.

APPENDIX 4.0. Interview guide (players).

| Main Questions | Probes | Follow-Up |
|---|---|---|
| Introduction<br><br>1. Describe your playing involvement / career at club level<br>2. Describe your playing involvement at international / professional level.<br>3. How did you get your break into professional / international football? | - What was the key to making it?<br><br>- What did you do that other people did not? | - Summarize player's career to date |
| Ambitions<br><br>4. What are your ambitions in football?<br>5. When did you first start dreaming about your ambitions?<br>6. What steps will you have to take to achieve your ambitions?<br>7. What motivates you to want to achieve your ambitions?<br>8. Who supports you in these ambitions?<br>9. How do these people support you? | - Clarify specifics of ambitions and progress.<br><br>- Delve into specific motives.<br>- What things do they do that help? | - Summarize progress to date<br><br>- Clarify supporter's roles |
| Training Environment<br><br>10. Describe your typical training week.<br>11. How would you assess the level of challenge you experience daily?<br>12. How do you prepare for training, physically and mentally?<br>13. How would your assess the level of coaching you experience? | - Number of hours per week<br>- Describe challenge (physical, technical, mental)? | - Summarize |
| Personal Development<br><br>14. What are your strengths as a player?<br>15. What qualities do you have as a person that have contributed to your development as a player?<br>16. What are your mental strengths? /?<br>17. What does being professional mean to you, on and off the field? | - Probe specific strengths<br>- How do qualities help as a player?<br>- Which areas of your mental game do you want to develop | - Describe my view of the player |
| Overcoming Obstacles<br><br>18. What are the biggest obstacles you have had to overcome in your development as a player?<br>19. How did you overcome them?<br>20. Who helped you overcome them?<br>21. What sacrifices have you had to make in order to get this far as a player?<br>22. Have they been worth it? (Which sacrifices do you wish you didn't have to make?) | - Probe nature of obstacles<br><br>- Specific information<br><br>- Specific information | Summarize career path (go back to ambitions) |
| Mental Preparation / Toughness<br><br>23. How do you mentally prepare for a big game?<br>24. What mental qualities are the most important at the professional level?<br>25. How do you react when you make a mistake in training?<br>26. How do you react when you make a mistake in a game?<br>27. How much have you enjoyed your experiences? What is enjoyable?<br>28. How satisfied are you with the progress you have made so far?<br>29. What advice would you give to a 12-year-old player with lots of technical ability, based on your own personal experiences? | - Probe specific strengths<br>- How do qualities help you play?<br>- Request specific example<br>- Request specific example | - Relate answers back to personal development |

APPENDIX 5.0. Interview guide (coaches).

| Main Questions | Probes | Follow-Up |
|---|---|---|
| Introduction<br><br>1. How did you get involved in coaching | - Delve into background and experience? | - Summarize coaches' career to date |
| Desired Player Qualities<br><br>2. What are the most important qualities a player needs to make it as a professional / international?<br>3. How would you asses the level of the players you work with? | - Delve into specific motives.<br>- What things do they do that help? | - Summarize qualities<br><br>- Clarify supporter's roles |
| Training Environment<br><br>4. How do you prepare players for international / professional demands?<br>5. How do you structure the training environment?<br>6. What do you think are the biggest obstacles players have to overcome?<br>7. How do they overcome them? | - How much do you think your role is to help versus player's responsibility?<br>- How do you help? | - Summarize |
| Mental Aspects<br><br>8. What sacrifices do you think players have to make?<br>9. What are the mental strengths you are looking for in players?<br>10. How do you mentally prepare players?<br>11. What advice would you give to a player who has a chance of making it? | - What happens if a player doesn't have what it takes<br>- What sacrifices did you make as a player? | - Describe my view of a mentally strong player |

APPENDIX 6.0. Extract from fieldwork diary: Monitoring subjectivity in the research process.

Original Research Note: Hotel Room in Southern England, August 2000.

After visiting club D I am compelled to think they have a very traditional approach, despite their high profile manager being touted as 'progressive' in the media. They certainly merely seemed to pay lip service to contemporary coaching approaches. The training facility was poor, a non-league ground that had been renovated, which paled in comparison to the purpose-built, million-dollar facilities I had visited previously this week. The academy director was also the oldest person I had interviewed, and spoke using many 'old-school' cliches, and was not a youth specialist (in my eyes). A player who had played on the same team I played with as a youth told me 'off the record' that he had been poached from another club. I thought this was another old-fashioned idea – trying to wheel and deal young players rather than develop the one's already at your club. However, it transpired that the player left his former club because the academy director had also poached a new young coach who the player liked.

Reflection: During deskwork, October 2000

When I came to transcribe and analyze the data from club D, I realized that, in fact, the players were very happy with the coaching structure and the club seemed to be quite progressive, despite initial appearances. I recalled that, during my informal conversation with the player mentioned above, that the academy director did not coach players, and a new youth team coach had just been poached from a lower division club. So, even though the academy director appeared to be very 'old-school' in his speech, appearance, and maybe even his coaching, he was bringing in younger, progressive coaches to actually work with the players. Perhaps he was far more progressive than I originally thought. This reflection reveals a personal assumption – that I think traditional coaching approaches are ineffective and harm the development of young players.

APPENDIX 7.0. Practical implications for practitioners.

- Be aware of the potential of all players, not just those with size and strength (i.e., relative age advantage).
- Structure the soccer environment to remove potential obstacles.
- Emphasize, model, and reward disciplined behavior.
- Educate athletes that they should practice alone in addition to practicing with their team.
- Encourage athletes to develop other aspects of their personality in addition to their athletic identity.
- Help athletes to make decisions regarding the sacrifices they face.
- Remind athletes about their purposes and ambitions in order to help them delay gratification.
- Help athletes identify their motives. Emphasize the importance of different types of motives.
- Encourage athletes to adopt positive role models.
- Assist athletes with career planning decisions: Include proximal, intermediate, and distal goals are part of career planning decisions
- Heighten athletes' awareness regarding the selection of the most appropriate environment to suit their needs.
- Help athletes' identify potential obstacles or adversity they might face.
- Encourage resilience (i.e., help athletes to bounce back from adversity)
- Teach a range of coping skills. For example:
    - Teach adaptive cognitive and behavioral responses to making a mistake (i.e., not hiding on the field).
    - Encourage athletes to develop a sense of perspective to enable them to extract the pertinent information from coach feedback.
    - Re-frame critical game situations as opportunities, rather than threats.
    - Use humor at appropriate times.
- Work with parents to help them understand the various supportive roles they can fulfill (i.e., emotional, informational, and tangible).
- Work with parents to help them understand that they can also be perceived as a source of stress.
- Encourage athletes to access their available sources of social support, and emphasize that seeking help is not a sign of weakness.
- Encourage athletes to use friends as a source of emotional support. This may involve developing friendships outside of the immediate soccer environment.

- Make sure athletes are born in a country that loves soccer at the right time of the year!